

FASHIONING AN IDENTITY AND MEMORY OF THE WORLD WAR II  
GENERATION: AN ANALYSIS OF TOM BROKAW'S *THE GREATEST  
GENERATION*

by

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(Under the Direction of Tom Lessl)

ABSTRACT

In recent years, popular culture has experienced a rebirth of interest in World War II, with many films and books chronicling the war and those who experienced it. Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* and its sequel *The Greatest Generation Speaks* are two such artifacts of this rebirth. Brokaw's books memorialize the World War II generation by lifting them up, placing an emphasis on the values they exhibit, and instructing its audience to learn from this older generation in order to better themselves and the world around them. Through this memorialization, Brokaw creates an identity of the World War II generation as "the greatest generation" by selecting which aspects of them to emphasize and which to minimize, giving us examples of individuals who exemplify the World War II generation, and creating a dichotomy between the World War II generation and subsequent generations.

INDEX WORDS: Brokaw, greatest generation, epideictic, World War II, memorialize, commemorate, identity

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, whose most courageous battle was not fought during a war.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“I think this is the greatest generation any society has ever produced” (Brokaw, 1998, pxxx). Tom Brokaw spoke these words during NBC’s coverage of the fiftieth anniversary of the Allied invasion of Normandy. The aura of greatness surrounding the generation that fought World War II has become noticeable in recent years. We have been beckoned back to a time when B-17’s filled the skies and Sherman tanks roared across the French countryside. Volumes depicting the war between the Allies and Axis powers, most notably those of the late historian Stephen Ambrose, have appeared in bookstores across the country. Hollywood is also capitalizing on this rebirth of interest in World War II with films such as *Saving Private Ryan*, *Pearl Harbor*, and *Wind Talkers*. What is surprising about the immortalized generation that fought to keep the world safe from fascist tyranny is that there is no memorial in our nation’s capital to honor them.

World War I, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War all have national memorials, but World War II does not. With the endorsement of Steven Spielberg and Tom Hanks, who together produced the World War II miniseries *Band of Brothers*, a push has been made to build a World War II memorial in Washington D.C..

Two of the wars that have memorials in Washington D.C. occurred after World War II. How did the nation overlook its need to memorialize these individuals? In May 2004, the expected completion date of the memorial, the World War II generation will finally have a memorial that honors their service. Does this mean that the World War II generation has not yet been memorialized in American culture? If you were to drive

through many of the small towns littered across America, you would find some type of memorial in close proximity to either the courthouse or town square that honors World War II veterans. Even my own hometown of Ellijay, Georgia, though barely large enough to require traffic lights, has a memorial honoring this nation's soldiers. However, such provincial memorials have only provincial purposes. The purpose of having a national memorial in Washington D.C. is to provide the opportunity for the American community to memorialize and honor them. Taking this into account, another question arises: Will this be the only highly accessible, honorable, and appropriate memorial to the World War II generation until 2004? I believe that some of the rhetoric currently circulating in America serves to memorialize the World War II generation. In particular, I believe that Tom Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* are two such artifacts of this rhetoric.

### **Memorializing as Epideictic Rhetoric**

I believe that looking at how physical memorials operate can help us better understand how discursive memorials operate, especially since there is not much research on the functions of discursive memorialization. Research on physical memorials may help us understand how characteristics of discursive memorialization that are also present in physical memorialization operate. Clearly, there are differences between physical memorials and discursive memorialization, but it is the similarities between the two that I feel are useful to this study. Both the future World War II memorial and *The Greatest Generation* will pay tribute to those who fought in World War II. Although the World War II generation is being memorialized, a message is also being sent to those who were

born after it. Both the memorial and Brokaw's books frame the past and those within it in their own particular way. The connection between the two is that by memorializing, they both sacralize "individuals, places, and ideas" (Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti, p. 150).

There is much research on memorializing. Peter Ehrenhaus (1988) discusses the "voice" of memorials in his analysis of the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial. He states that through memorials, "a community commemorates the actions and sacrifices of individuals, and celebrates the values of the community reflected in those actions" (Ehrenhaus, p. 47). A memorial's inscriptions, function, or design, speak to those who visit it. In discussing war memorials, he says that they speak with the voice of the community. That voice tells us about those being honored as well as the past event that enveloped them. By speaking to us, memorials "block alternative interpretations of the past, of our community, and our place in it" (Ehrenhaus, p. 48).

Harry W. Haines (1986) discusses the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in his research. Maya Lin's design, which many find to be ambiguous in appearance, speaks a similarly ambiguous message about the war. Within the national community there were many interpretations of the war and of those who fought it. The ambiguity of the memorial reflects these different interpretations and meanings. For some, the enormous list of names reflects the war's great human cost, while for others the names of the individuals fallen symbolize the personal nature of the tragedy. According to Haines, "the memorial's image has been defined through our mediated experience, developing a sense of expectation in visitors about its 'aura'" (Haines, p. 8).

Victoria Gallagher (1995) explores more deeply the possibility of multiple meanings of memorials in her analysis of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial in Atlanta.

According to her, memorials are rhetorical ‘based on the extent to which such artifacts are intended by their creators and/or perceived by audiences to perpetuate values, admonish as to future conduct, and affirm or challenge existing power relations’ (Gallagher, p. 112). With this, she raises the issue of intent versus interpretation. As seen by the discussion of the wall at the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial, ‘postmodernism rejoices in ambiguous forms that resist closure and lead to multiple interpretations and functionalities’ (Gallagher, p. 113). Although King’s tomb has the inscription ‘Free at Last. Free at Last. Thank God Almighty I’m Free at Last’ which clearly tells us of the conclusion of his mortal struggle for Civil Rights, the eternal flame offers many messages including ‘the flame of righteousness that will not be quenched, an inner flame or spirit that exists beyond death, the religious symbolism of an eternal flame, and so on’ (Gallagher, p. 115).

Blair and Michel (2000) also discuss the rhetorical performances of Civil Rights memorials. Their subject is the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama that was also designed by the Vietnam Veteran Memorial’s Maya Lin. They depict Civil Rights memorials as ‘rhetorical performances that reproduce the tactical dimensions of the Civil Rights Movement protests of the 1950’s and 1960’s’ (Blair and Michel, p. 31). In designing this monument, Lin had to plan for the monuments’ effects. These responses are in a sense what create the structure’s memorializing effects upon people and this success, in turn, determines the memorials’ effectiveness.

These studies all assume that structure functions rhetorically, that architecture operates as the medium through which the architect addresses his or her audience, just as a book is the medium through which an author addresses an audience. Darryl

Hattenhauer (1984) helps explain how this works in his research on the rhetoric of architecture. He argues that architecture has a necessary rhetorical function, a semiotics in which “the meaning of a thing consists not in the thing itself but in its relation to other things” (Hattenhauer, p. 71). Thus, the Vietnam Memorial’s list of names means more than just a large marble wall. Hattenhauer’s discussion of semiotics revolves around the notion of the sign, divisible into signifier and a signified. He contends that “the clearest examples of what architectural signifiers connote is exemplified in ceremonial and monumental architecture” (Hattenhauer, p. 72). “Architects can predict what behavior their designs will induce” through architecture’s ability to “encourage the receivers either to change or reaffirm their behavior and beliefs.” Furthermore, “architecture that represents values and beliefs is rhetorical because it induces ritual behavior” (Hattenhauer, p. 73-74). Architecture calls on its audience to react to what it embodies. This can be observed as a cause and effect relationship. The effect is that the audience is instructed to act a certain way. What then is the cause? The cause is the architecture that places an emphasis on values. The audience is induced to act a certain way not because of sound reasoning or careful deliberation. Rather, the audience is induced through epideictic means. Epideictic does not *argue* that something is a particular way as much as it *states* that something is a particular way.

### **Epideictic Framework of Memorializing**

The preceding literature illustrates that memorials are not only rhetorical, but more specifically epideictic. To understand how Tom Brokaw’s *Greatest Generation* fits within this framework, it may also help to look at literature that discusses epideictic

rhetoric. Takis Poulakos (1987) argues through his analysis of Isocrates's *Evagoras* that epideictic rhetoric makes "an unmistakable reference to the world of lived experience" (Poulakos, p. 323). He points out that epideictic's function of illuminating or radiating is temporal. Since the subject being illuminated or radiated is temporal, the rhetoric surrounding it should have a temporal dimension as well. His analysis of the *Evagoras* focuses on the term *epainos*, which refers to "the radiance or illumination that emanates from the excellence of a person or an event" (Poulakos, p. 323). Rhetoric that uses this does more than just inform—it lifts up. For example, the function of a eulogy is to illuminate or radiate the excellence of the deceased. Only good traits, qualities, and deeds are presented.

An important aspect of *epainos* is its temporal dimension. In discussing this dimension, Poulakos refers to state-funeral speeches. In these speeches, "the *epainos* was expanded into a historical account of the community's past" (Poulakos, p. 323). The death of a warrior is not a single death. Rather, the death is seen as existing within a historical framework. Thus, when an American soldier dies, that soldier is said to have died while defending the United States, regardless of whether the nation was at war or the death was not related to combat. The nation honors the fallen soldier by illuminating the patriotic and sacrificial duties that are part of the longstanding tradition of being a U.S. soldier. Epideictic rhetoric, as shown through Poulakos's analysis of *Evagoras*, "magnifies events and endows them with status and significance" (Poulakos, p. 324).

Bernard Duffy (1983) treats epideictic's concern with values. In epideictic rhetoric, the values brought forth are "not available to dispute" (Duffy, p. 81). For example, when someone delivers a eulogy, he or she does not try to persuade the

audience that the deceased exhibited honorable qualities. These qualities are presented as certain, needing only to be illuminated and amplified as qualities we wish the whole community would exhibit. Thus, Matthews (1995) points out in his analysis of former Baseball Commissioner A. Bartlett Giamatti's rhetoric surrounding the Pete Rose controversy, epideictic rhetoric moves to nurture the community (Matthews, p. 275). This means that epideictic rhetoric hopes to better the condition of the community. Whether Giamatti was praising the idealistic values of baseball or blaming Rose for disregarding those values, his ultimate goal was to better the condition of the community.

Celeste Condit (1985) discusses the defining characteristics of epideictic rhetoric and how it is carried out in three functions of definition/understanding, shaping of community, and displaying entertainment. These three functions define epideictic "experience" (Condit, p. 284). First, epideictic rhetoric defines or creates an understanding of a subject, such as a view toward the World War II generation. Then, this view is displayed in an attempt to shape its audience. In particular, the rhetoric aims at shaping its audience according to the characteristics and values that it selects to illuminate. This relates to Brokaw's work because it sheds light onto how epideictic rhetoric instructs. Not only does Brokaw want to tell his audience about the World War II generation, but he also wants to tell them how today's society can be a better place if we lived our lives like they did. Brokaw instructs by first providing an example and then teaching from that example.

Epideictic rhetoric's attempt to increase adherence to values is also illustrated in Lester Olson's (1983) analysis of the iconography of Norman Rockwell's "Four Freedoms" paintings and Franklin Roosevelt's attempt to draw Americans into World

War II (Olson, p. 15). These paintings, celebrating Americans' freedom from want, freedom of speech, freedom to worship, and freedom from fear, lift up American values and at the same time remind Americans that these values are not exhibited in other parts of the world. Thus, they argued that Americans should participate in World War II in order to give those who are denied these values the opportunity to possess and adhere to them.

Barbara Beisecker's (2002) recent work argues that reconstructions of recent World War II commemorations, such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Greatest Generation* "function rhetorically as civic lessons for a generation beset by fractious disagreements about the viability of U.S. culture and identity" (Beisecker, p. 393). She points out that these works were released to the public amidst the English Only debates in Los Angeles and the impeachment debates of Bill Clinton. While the nation was being splintered, these epideictic pieces presented values and lessons that served as examples for Americans to follow. For example, in order for Captain John Miller, played by Tom Hanks, to succeed in his mission, he had to rely on his multicultural squad consisting of a "bookish, feminized translator, the merciful medic, the Brooklyn bad boy, the Scripture-citing sharpshooter, the Italian, and the Jew" (Beisecker, p. 395). If only the nation today could learn as these men did—that if they would embrace people different from themselves and work together, they could make the world a better place.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) stress that epideictic rhetoric should be seen as a central part of persuasion. They discuss how Aristotle's perception of epideictic oratory as being "concerned with praise and blame" made "what is beautiful or ugly" his "sole concern" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 48). However, epideictic rhetoric

does more than just illuminate preferred or desired values. As it illuminates, it also urges us to strive to appropriate these values. These values are preferred or desired because they ultimately lead to a better well being of not only individuals, but the community as a whole.

Walter Beale (1978) discusses how epideictic rhetoric elevates through what he calls the "rhetorical performative," which he defines as:

The composed and more or less unified act of rhetorical discourse which does not merely say, argue, or allege something about the world of social action, but which constitutes (in some special way defined by the conventions or customs of a community) a significant social action in itself (Beale, p. 225).

Adding more detail to this attribute of epideictic, he points out that:

Whereas the deliberative or informative rhetorical act may refer to or propose actions and may in doing so be correct or incorrect, convincing or unconvincing, the performative rhetorical act *participates* in actions, and in doing so may be appropriate or inappropriate, seemly or unseemly (Beale, p. 225).

Beale's use of the term "rhetorical performative" suggests that epideictic rhetoric takes an active role and participates rather than being solely decorative. But how does it perform? We have discussed how epideictic rhetoric illuminates values that people wish to possess. Thus, one way epideictic rhetoric performs is by inspiring people to actively try to exhibit those values. Performance and participation can also be physical and tangible. When discussion about the need for a national World War II memorial began to surface in the early 1990's, obviously there had to be people illuminating and elevating the World War II generation in ways that made others feel that it deserved to be honored and enshrined with a memorial. In this way, there was an active performance of debate,

legislation, and planning a memorial, rather than merely acknowledging that generation and not doing anything physical to follow through.

### ***The Greatest Generation* and Tom Brokaw as Author**

*The Greatest Generation* is a book that chronicles the lives of those who participated in World War II, both at home and abroad. The book contains stories of individuals and is essentially a collection of biographies, focusing on the wartime lives of individuals. The narratives are grouped into categories describing the common bond between them. These categories, which make up the chapters of the book, include “ordinary people,” “home front,” “heroes,” “women in uniform,” “shame,” “love, marriage, and commitment,” “famous people,” and “the arena.” The chapter titled “home front” has narratives about people who fought on the home front, making the war products that the troops overseas desperately needed. “Shame” gives us narratives about people who were of different ethnic groups and races that overcame obstacles such as racism, prejudice, and even internment to fight during the war.

Tom Brokaw’s second book, *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, is a project that resulted from his first work. According to Brokaw, “*The Greatest Generation* seems to have inspired within many families, communities, schools, and even corners of the political arena a reevaluation of the past, and a dialogue about the core values of that time and of the present” (Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, p. xxi). People began to express a new appreciation for the generation and an appreciation for Brokaw’s highlighting of them in his book. He introduces the second book by commenting on how countless people thanked him for writing the book and how he has received an

“avalanche of letters” from members of the World War II generation as well as his own generation telling him about “the heroism, values, friendships, and pain of those times, and of the effect the book and its memories of the Depression and World War II had on their lives today” (Brokaw, *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, p. xxi).

Born in 1940 to Jean and Red Brokaw, Brokaw spent his early years on an Army base in South Dakota where his father worked as a construction-equipment operator and mechanic. After the war, the family moved to Yankton, South Dakota where Brokaw took up athletics and student government in high school. After high school, Brokaw landed a job at a TV station in Sioux City, Iowa as an all-purpose announcer. He stayed with the station until graduating from the University of South Dakota, hoping that it would enable him to escape his poor rural setting. He married his high school friend and later college sweetheart, Meredith Auld, in 1962 and accepted a better TV job in Omaha, Nebraska. He moved to Atlanta and worked for WSB-TV for only one year before joining the news staff at KNBC in Los Angeles, working along side Bryant Gumbel. He was NBC’s White House correspondent in the early 1970’s and from 1976 to 1981 hosted the Today show alongside Jane Pauley. In 1982 he co-anchored NBC’s Nightly News with Roger Mudd and began his twenty-year stint as sole anchor a year later when Mudd departed (Carlin & Heyne, 1999, p. 91).

Brokaw’s experience and reputation are significant attributes that give him credibility and authority as an author. He has now been in the public spotlight for four decades and has instant name recognition that has Americans view him as not only an authority, but also a trusted friend. From 1976 to 1981, Americans began their day with Brokaw. As is the case with most morning shows, controversial or slanted stories were

avoided. Brokaw was simply there to help America wake up and get off on the right foot. Although the program was not as noteworthy as the Nightly News, Brokaw's face was often the first face Americans saw each day. As anchor of the Nightly News, Brokaw not only informed America about what was going on, but also tried to help them make sense of it. As Bryant Gumbel states, "when people watch him, they feel he isn't just reading from a script...they feel he knows what he's talking about" (Carlin & Heyn, p. 91). Over many years, Brokaw has become the most authoritative and public voice for American consumers of news, one especially depended on during significant events. With this, Brokaw seems to project a mainstream, all-American image. He has come to be not only a voice that Americans turn to in order to learn about the events of their country, but also a voice that they have come to trust. Thus, because Brokaw writes *The Greatest Generation*, Americans feel that the subject matter is significant and more people read it because his name is attached. For twenty years, Americans have trusted Brokaw to inform them about the world in which they live. When Brokaw tells us about the World War II generation, we listen and trust his judgment. Also, he has gained an expertise about World War II. He covered the commemoration services of the fortieth and fiftieth anniversaries of the invasion of Normandy as well as served as the Master of Ceremonies for the opening of the National D-Day Museum (MSNBC.com, p. 2).

These books can be situated within a broader genre of celebrity discourses. Tom Brokaw's contemporaries have used their name recognition to publish works as well. Dan Rather's works include *Deadlines and Datelines: Essays At the Turn of the Century* (1999), *The American Dream: Stories from the Heart of Our Nation* (2001), while Peter Jennings has the anthology *The Century* (1998) and *In Search of America* (2002) to add

to his credit. A common theme runs throughout this genre. Each anchorman uses his role as a celebrity to tell their audience about their history and the individuals who make up this history. By using their recognized identities of well-respected news anchors, they come across to their audiences as trusted authorities. Their identities give their audiences the assumption that their books contain the similar unbiased nonfiction that is present in the reporting they do for network television.

Another attribute that gives Brokaw credibility when making comparisons between the World War II generation and the Baby Boomers is the fact that he belongs to neither of these groups. Born in 1940, he identifies himself as not being a part of either the World War II generation or the Baby Boomers (Brokaw, 1998, p. 231). Along with other individuals such as Senator John McCain, Brokaw was too young to truly experience World War II, but he was not born in the postwar era. As one seeming to stand apart, he feels that he can objectively compare the World War II generation and the Baby Boomers because he is not within either of them.

In his discussion of the World War II generation, Brokaw is in a sense teaching us who they are. His claims they are the greatest generation in history, and by giving narratives about them, he tries to bolster that claim. In doing this, he makes them go from being mere individuals to becoming participants in a collective generational identity, the greatest generation. We already had definition of these people prior to reading Brokaw's books, as are our parents, grandparents, neighbors, and teachers. However, after reading Brokaw's books they have a new identity and we have a new memory of them.

## Research Questions

Epidictic rhetoric radiates, illuminates, lifts up, places emphasis on values, and aims to increase adherence to its illuminated values. Through the previous discussion of memorializing, we can see that it performs these functions as well. Therefore, questions arise regarding the relationship between the two genres. Does Tom Brokaw's epidictic rhetoric about the Greatest Generation serve to memorialize them? Yes. The World War II generation does not have to wait until 2004, the date of the National World War II Memorial's completion, to be memorialized. Brokaw's rhetoric memorializes the World War II generation by illuminating, radiating and commemorating them.

The three main aspects of epidictic rhetoric previously discussed will guide my analysis. These are 1) epidictic's power to radiate, illuminate, and lift up, 2) its emphasis on values, and 3) its aims to instruct or increase adherence to its illuminated values. More specifically, these aspects can be characterized as effects of memorialization. If Brokaw's Greatest Generation literature produces these effects, what are their causes? How is the World War II generation lifted up and redefined by Brokaw's work? How do readers come to know the values of the World War II generation according to Brokaw and how are these values emphasized? How does Brokaw instruct readers to increase adherence to the values he illuminates? These questions will be answered through a critical analysis of Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks*.

The critical analysis of Brokaw's books will consist of three sections. The first section will discuss how Brokaw radiates, illuminates, and lifts up the World War II generation. The second section will discuss how Brokaw places an emphasis on values

exhibited by the World War II generation. Finally, the third section will discuss how Brokaw instructs his audience to adhere and strive toward values exhibited by the World War II generation. After this critical analysis, I will discuss in the final chapter the apparent effects *The Greatest Generation* has in society, the role of Tom Brokaw as rhetor, and the drive to build a World War II memorial in Washington D.C. This study will show that criticism of memorialization not only provides an advantageous way of analyzing Brokaw's texts, but it also leads to defining those texts within its framework.

In a topic such as this, critical objectivity is something that may come into question. Most people want to think of their elders as virtuous. This comes into question even more with a group of individuals who experienced so much and played such a prominent role in American history. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not to accept or reject Brokaw's claim that the World War II generation is great. Rather, it is to show how he, as rhetor, posits that claim throughout his rhetoric and how that claim is bolstered through memorializing the World War II generation.

Critical objectivity is an important factor not only with an important generation, but also important individuals as well. Barry Schwartz's (2000) research on how Abraham Lincoln was viewed immediately after his death compared to how he is viewed today shows how the Progressive era reshaped people's perceptions and memories of Lincoln from a controversial war president into a middleclass reformer. The progressives and many reformers that followed used Lincoln as a vehicle to symbolize the aims of their movements. This identity of Lincoln, rather than the true Lincoln that historians argue was much different, became instilled into American culture (Schwartz, 2000, p. 24). This study of *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* will

attempt to show that Tom Brokaw performs a similar act. Through his books, he creates a new identity and memory for the World War II generation. The research on this topic is significant because, whereas Barry Schwartz shows how the identity and memory of one man was recreated, I will show how an entire generation's identity and memory is recreated.

In summary, the purpose of this project is to discuss how Tom Brokaw's Greatest Generation rhetoric memorializes the World War II generation. Through that memorialization, Brokaw creates a new identity and memory of that generation as the greatest generation for his audience. Once that identity is accepted through recognition and understanding, we are instructed to mimic and learn from it. By doing this, we can make our world and ourselves better.

## CHAPTER 2

### MEMORIALIZATION AS EPIDEICTIC RHETORIC: ITS FUNCTIONS AND *THE GREATEST GENERATION* AS MEMORIALIZATION

To understand the role of Brokaw as rhetor, his work should be placed within a genre of rhetoric. By placing it within a genre, characteristics and concepts of that genre can help us understand not only Brokaw's motives, but also his techniques. This chapter will place *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* within the genre of memorialization, which is a subcategory of the broader genre of epideictic. By doing this, we can derive the key functions of memorialization and then use those key functions as guiding principles for the critical analysis of Brokaw's rhetoric that will come in the chapters to follow.

In *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, Barry Schwartz (2000) discusses how the memory and identity of Lincoln changed over time. He looked at the different ways Lincoln was memorialized from the time of his death until today. Schwartz found that our current memory of Lincoln and his present identity is quite different from the one that predominated immediately after his death. Lincoln was a controversial president who not only had a semi-aristocratic background but also was also a white supremacist (Schwartz, 2000, p. 6). But during the Progressive era, 'progressive ideals were communicated in the form of a national 'man of the people'' mythology that departed from the facts of Lincoln's life (Schwartz, 2000, p. 24). Instead of being viewed as a war president, Lincoln came to be viewed as a middle class reformer who was not only the friend to everyone, but also a champion of equality. Through his memorializing

Lincoln was given not only a new identity, but a new memory as well. According to Schwartz, this reshaping was performed by the progressives of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and communicated to Americans through memorialization.

In *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, Tom Brokaw likewise attempts to shape a new identity and memory for the World War II generation. Through memorialization, he gives his audience an image of that generation that is consistent with his claim that they are the greatest generation in American history. Prior to analyzing *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* I would like to consider how memorializing operates. An understanding of this genre of rhetoric will provide the groundwork for the rest of this thesis and outline the three epideictic effects of memorialization, which are the criteria that will be used in the critical analysis.

The first epideictic effect is that memorializing radiates, illuminates, and lifts up whatever is being memorialized. Memorializing lifts a subject up from out of the ordinary to make it extraordinary. Subjects lifted up by being memorialized are thus recognized. In *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, people who were previously unknown are lifted up and praised. Others that are already known are lifted and praised through recognition of aspects or histories of their lives that are not previously known. If a rhetor memorializes a subject by educating an audience about what it does not already know, then the rhetor shapes the identity and memory of that subject.

The second epideictic effect of memorializing is the illumination of those values exhibited by its subjects. This effect coincides with the first effect. When fallen astronauts are memorialized in a presidential address, bravery and courage are recognized

as values they exhibited. In essence, displaying the exceptional expression of the subject's values is what leads to it being lifted up. These are values that we all would like to exhibit ourselves. In memorializing, a rhetor selects the values that are to be illuminated and the degree to which they are to have presence in the discourse. At the same time the rhetor selects vices that are to be ignored or forgotten. In Brokaw's literature, responsibility is praised while prejudice, which was pervasive in pre and postwar America, is neglected or artfully moved outside of the confines of the World War II generation.

The third epideictic effect of memorializing coincides with the second. By emphasizing the values exhibited by the subject, we are also being instructed to adhere to those values. Ronald Reagan's Challenger speech, for instance, places an emphasis on courage and bravery exhibited by the "pioneer" astronauts. Despite their loss, the U.S. space program will not end, because "the Challenger crew was pulling us into the future and we'll continue to follow them" (Reagan, p. 95). Their virtues are conjoined with the ongoing life of the space program. Thus in order to be courageous and brave we must back the continuation of the shuttle program. The values esteemed in memorialization are often ordinary values that are expressed in exceptional ways, values we wish we were able to emulate. Through memorializing, we are asked to strive toward obtaining and adhering to those values in the same way the subjects of the memorialization did. Doing this not only makes us better, but makes the world we live in better as well. This effect is significant because while it is created through memorialization that instructs, the rhetor is the true instructor because the subject was created by the rhetor. In *The Greatest Generation*, readers are told, through the eyes of the World War II generation, about the

benefits of working hard and instructed to do so in order to make themselves and the world around them better. However, even though this message is told through the eyes of the World War II generation and their stories “speak for themselves,” Brokaw still operates as the rhetor because he chooses what stories to include and which stories to leave out.

In Book I of *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle divides oratory into the three categories of deliberative, forensic, and epideictic. Epideictic oratory “either praises or censures somebody” (Aristotle, p. 32). We praise individuals for upholding or exhibiting exceptional expressions of ordinary values and virtues. Thus, implicitly at least, epideictic presents to the public persons worthy of emulation because of how they display values and virtues. Conversely, blaming presents persons who should not be emulated because of their inability to express desirable values and virtues.

By definition, memorializing falls within the genre of epideictic, which praises or blames, because its inherent purpose of commemorating praises its subject. Barry Schwartz (1982) states “commemoration lifts from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary events which embody our deepest and most fundamental values” (Schwartz, p. 377). Likewise, Carole Blair, Marsha Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci (1991) describe the epideictic function of public commemorative monuments as “their most obvious rhetorical feature” (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, p. 263). Still, these descriptions do not give us a completely clear understanding of how commemoration works. We know that it can fall into the category of epideictic rhetoric, but what benefits of insight do we gain by labeling commemoration as epideictic? I believe that if we understand the

functions of epideictic rhetoric, we can better grasp how commemoration operates. This better understanding will then guide this analysis of Brokaw's books.

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) provide some help in stressing that epideictic rhetoric is inherently persuasive (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 49). More specifically, they state that "epidictic oratory has significance and importance for argumentation, because it strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 50). In Ronald Reagan's Challenger speech, he attempted to create an identification of the audience with the celebrated heroes. He states "We've grown used to the idea of space and perhaps we forget that we've only just begun. We're still pioneers. They the members of the Challenger crew, were pioneers...the Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them" (Reagan, p. 95). The astronauts are not the only pioneers, "we're still pioneers" and "we've only just begun." Thus, because we are identified pioneers as well, we must act like the brave and courageous astronauts who are also pioneers. Furthermore, because "the Challenger crew was pulling us into the future, and we'll continue to follow them" we act like the individuals who set precedence for us (Reagan, p. 95).

Such persuasion is subtle and hidden. Brokaw does not explicitly tell readers that they must be as modest, hardworking, and responsible as was the World War II generation. Rather, he shows them the benefits of exceptional expressions of such values as well as the consequences of neglecting them. No one denies that modesty, a strong work ethic, and responsibility are values. However, memorializing the World War II generation and illuminating exceptional expressions of these values in their lives

favorably disposes readers to integrate these values into their own lives. Imagine walking through a bookstore and coming across Brokaw's *The Greatest Generation*. You scan its title and immediately recognize Brokaw's premise: he thinks that the World War II generation is the greatest generation in American history. You are skeptical and consider other generations, such as the Baby Boomers or even Generation X. Giving Brokaw the benefit of a doubt, you purchase the book and commence reading it that night. Chapter by chapter, you become more and more convinced that maybe Brokaw has something. You finish the book and find yourself with a new respect for World War II veterans and agree that they are the greatest generation in history. Brokaw's praise of the World War II generation has persuaded you to accept his argument. This example illustrates how epideictic rhetoric can move individuals to action. When you first saw the book in the store, you were unsure about Brokaw's argument. However, as he praised its characters, your disposition toward accepting the argument was strengthened. You may have previously acknowledged that the World War II generation was good, but after reading the book, you feel the need to emulate them. This type of reaction occurred after September 11, 2001 with regard to the firefighters of New York City. After watching news stories and documentaries about the firefighters on that day, American gratitude and praise toward them intensified, as was evidenced by the multitude of people wearing hats and shirts with "FDNY" (Fire Department of New York) printed on them.

Persuasion is subsumed by Aristotle, under the canopy of rhetoric, which he defines as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle, p. 24). Yet, the hidden aspect of persuasion within epideictic has troubled critics throughout history. Whereas persuasion within deliberative and forensic settings

may be considered overt, epideictic persuasion is not. Perhaps the failure of early rhetoricians to recognize its persuasive potency caused them to think it merely decorative. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca contend that early rhetoricians regarded epideictic as a less significant form of rhetoric and neglected its study. These early rhetoricians felt that it should be “regarded in the same light as a dramatic spectacle or an athletic contest” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 48). However, if the Olympic Games were designed for the purpose of glorifying the human body, is it not safe to assume that spectators felt it more worthy of glory, after watching the games than before?

If epideictic rhetoric inevitably elicits certain types of reactions, what are these reactions? According to James Herrick, one of these is emulation (Herrick, p. 80). We lift up individuals because we deem them superior by virtue of pertinent actions that are recognized as virtuous. Virtue is seen as something ideal for which to strive. Thus, if someone is deemed virtuous, he or she has obtained something that we as admirers have not yet or will never obtain. This means the virtuous person invites emulation not merely because of being virtuous, but because of what the individual had to do in order to be recognized as virtuous. However, in order to be emulated, the person must first be recognized. Lifting up or illuminating the virtuous individual enables others to recognize their virtue. How the rhetor lifts up individuals for emulation and how the audience views that individual depend on how the rhetor frames the recognition.

Lawrence Rosenfield (1980) provides further understanding of the relationship between being and doing in epideictic. He translates the verb *epideixis*, from which the term epideictic derives, as “to shine or show forth.” Thus, he concludes “epideictic, therefore, acts to unshroud men’s notable deeds in order to let us gaze at the aura glowing

from within” (Rosenfield, p. 135). In order to gaze upon the virtuous, our view must be made clear. Virtuous people are hidden among us. But only when their deeds are radiated, illuminated, and lifted up can we see these internal states. This is important with regard to Brokaw’s literature. Rather than simply praising them for who they are, he constructs narratives describing the actions of the World War II generation. Of the many actions performed by members of the World War II generation, Brokaw tells us only of the actions that paint them in a favorable and virtuous light. Our memory of them and their identity is necessarily limited in accordance with the purposes of illumination that guide Brokaw as author.

If virtuous people are emulated through epideictic rhetoric, it only stands to reason that this genre should emphasize virtuous actions. At some point in time, the virtuous people were just like everybody else. They then did something that lifted them above everybody else, but the actual action was not what lifted them up. Rather, it was this virtue that lay behind these actions. For example, almost 3,400 people have received the Congressional Medal of Honor. Each recipient performed unique deeds. However, all of these were similar in that the person performing them distinguished "himself or herself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life or her life above and beyond the call of duty while engaged in an action against an enemy of the United States” and “the deed performed must have been one of personal bravery or self-sacrifice so conspicuous as to clearly distinguish the individual above his comrades and must have involved risk of life” (Army Regulation, 600-8-22). Those who receive the Congressional Medal of Honor exhibit gallantry, bravery, and self-sacrifice. Thus, emphasis is placed on the values associated with the soldiers' actions.

If actions are emulated because of the values they represent, it is then epideictic's job to illuminate those values for an audience. As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca discuss, "the speaker sets himself different goals depending on the kind of speech he is making" and with epideictic it is a question "of recognizing values" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, p. 48). This can clearly be seen in Stephanie Larson and Martha Bailey's (1998) research on ABC's "Person of the Week." Their analysis of five years of "ABC World News Tonight's "Person of the Week"" concludes that the program emulates particular values exhibited by these individuals honored. Prominent among these are the classical American values of individualism, heroism, and unselfishness (Larson & Bailey, p. 487). The news segment emphasizes these values and essentially declares that the reason why the individual is being highlighted is because he or she exhibited these values. These values presumably enable the individuals to perform such deeds. In the ABC show, individualism, heroism, and unselfishness do not need to be proven as esteemed values. They are naturally and inherently accepted as such. In *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, the World War II generation is memorialized because they possess values such as hard work, responsibility, and commitment, and because they possess these values they were able to accomplish the great tasks that Brokaw illuminates. The importance of the values is not questioned. As Cicero said in *De Partitione Oratoria*, "epideictic does not establish propositions that are doubtful but amplifies statements that are certain or accepted as being certain" (Cicero, 365).

As previously noted, the virtuous individuals that epideictic invites us to emulate were once like us. This fact is significant because it demonstrates the feasibility of

reaching that higher plane. If the individual on ABC's 'Person of the Week' segment is being emulated because he or she exhibited particular values, then other people can be deemed virtuous as well who exhibit the same values through imitation. In Bernard Duffy's (1983) discussion of Plato's *Phaedrus*, he points out the 'utility of epideictic discourse as a means to instruct an individual in a philosophical precept' (Duffy, p. 79). Duffy's use of the word 'instruct' is important. The implication is that epideictic rhetoric tells us what values we should strive towards. Through this instruction, the discourse aims at bettering the community. Thus, the epideictic discourse takes on a teaching dimension.

Dale Sullivan (1992) gives another example of the instructive function of epideictic rhetoric in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, a Christian martyr of the early second century. On his journey to Rome, where he was to be executed, Ignatius wrote seven letters that attempted to define the boundaries of orthodoxy and separate it from heretical teachings. Through these epideictic letters he 'attempts to increase adherence to the values he lauds' by creating the dialectic of 'what we are' versus 'what we are not' (Sullivan, p. 71). The description of 'what we are' lifts up values and morals that create a desired social structure. This praise of 'what we are' operates by showing that if we do not uphold the values Ignatius speaks highly of, we are truly not who we should be. By forming the dialectic between 'what we are' and 'what we are not' Ignatius essentially constructs for his followers a parallel grammar about 'what they should do' and 'what they should not do.' His followers do not want to fall into the category of what Ignatius calls 'what we are not.' Thus, in order to be 'what we are,' his followers must internalize the illuminated values. This strategy creates a situation where his followers

have no choice but to adhere to the values Ignatius illuminates. A similar strategy is seen in Brokaw's rhetoric. When discussing values of the World War II generation, he describes their absence among generations that followed. For example, he discusses how the older generation encounters irresponsible people who do not properly care for or teach their children things that were taught to them. Obviously, we do not want to be like these individuals the elders are describing. These bad individuals are those who "want others to take care of their kids...sending them to school at three years old just to get them out of the house" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 82). In order to not be viewed as irresponsible, parents must care for their kids and not send them off to school at an early age just to get them out of the house. Such actions by themselves might not be viewed as irresponsible, but when viewed in context with the responsibility exhibited by the World War II generation, they become adverse.

To narrow this discussion of epideictic rhetoric in accordance with my own topic, I now turn to its operation within the genre of memorializing. In exploring the functions and operations of this genre, I will look at both material and discursive examples. Among Washington D.C.'s many memorials, one that has had a significant impact on both academics and visitors is the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial. Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci consider the Vietnam Memorial a complex public symbol that "selects from history those events, individuals, places, and ideas that will be sacralized by a culture or a polity" (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, p. 263). They contend that memorials 'instruct' their visitors about what is to be valued in the future by recognizing values exhibited in the past. Furthermore, they stress that the term 'monument' is derived from the Latin word

*monere*, which means to remind, admonish, warn, advise, and instruct (Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, p. 263).

The etymological derivation of the term ‘monument’ is significant considering the similarities of physical and discursive memorialization. Both commemorate and remind audiences of the past while at the same time instructing them to adhere to a message they communicate. Even though *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* have many differences from physical memorials, there are several commonalities between them. Both modes of commemoration lift up their subjects, tell us why the subjects are lifted up, and move us to action with regard to what we learn about that subject.

Though the memorial abstractly commemorates, there were intentional community messages that design candidates were required to include by the imposed guidelines. Maya Lin’s design was chosen through a competition that invited artists to submit original designs but with certain requirements, most noteworthy being a list of names of the dead and missing which illuminated the “worth of the individual” (Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, p. 278). The monument magnifies individuals by taking them out of obscurity and placing an importance upon them. The way that individuals are magnified through the wall is similar to how Brokaw magnifies ordinary individuals and gives them the identity of being extraordinary and virtuous people.

A different message is spoken by the manner in which the wall lists its names. The list, which is organized chronologically by date of death, begins at the center of the wall, proceeds to the right to the end of the wall. It then starts again on the end of the left wall and concludes at the center. ‘To accept the symmetry of the wall’s structure is to

break the sequence: to follow the sequence is necessarily to counter the symmetry” (Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, p. 274). The asymmetry of the wall and its message show how the memorial is rhetorical and speaks a message. The memorial does more than just list the names of those lost during the war. The names become the memorial. A common practice on Memorial Day is to publicly read the names of soldiers who have either died or are listed as missing in action. While this is a reverent practice, it often does not have as great an impact on individuals as does the Memorial itself. Though both list names, the symmetry and organization of the names lifts up and illuminates those who were lost. Carlson and Hocking (1988) discuss how the unique sequence of names on the wall helps bring closure for some by bringing “the names of those killed at the beginning and at the end of the war...together” (Carlson and Hocking, 205). Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci also state that others see the break in the wall’s symmetry as a denial of closure. Both messages are found because both speak to differing meanings that visitors take from the Vietnam War.

The unique and ambiguous construction of the architecture allows multiple illuminations. To some, it illuminates the magnitude of the casualties. For others, it brings forth the sense of a lack of closure. Harry W. Haines (1996) also discusses how the memorial’s ambiguous design enables it to illuminate multiple aspects of the Vietnam experience. He feels that the ambiguity of the memorial reflects the many interpretations of the war expressed by the national community. For some, the enormous list of names reflects the war’s great human cost, while for others the names of the individual fallen symbolize personal nature of the tragedy. The design “transforms Vietnam’s grim

statistics into an abstract image of sacrifice, generating rituals of remembrance and self-recognition within the context of Vietnam memory” (Haines, p. 17).

Peter Ehrenhaus (1988) states, “through memorials, a community commemorates the actions and sacrifices of individuals, and celebrates the values of the community reflected in those actions” (Ehrenhaus, p. 47). This is precisely what Brokaw does in his literature. Through narratives, the World War II generation is lifted up because of the values they exhibit that enabled them to perform actions and sacrifices. Ehrenhaus also examines how the physical properties of the Lincoln Memorial commemorate by eliciting certain rhetorical effects. A prominent physical property is the memorial’s size. This size immediately gains the attention of its visitors and conveys the importance and magnitude of who and what it is honoring. The structure itself, with its white columns and classical architecture, has the appearance of an ancient temple honoring a god. The temple’s inhabitant, a giant statue of Lincoln, is placed above the visitor’s viewing plane. Visitors must look up and ascend to Lincoln, while his head is downcast looking below upon visitors. The memorial has many inscriptions as well. The names of the states surround the memorial symbolizing the Union he kept together—to tell visitors of the magnitude of Lincoln’s actions. His Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address are inscribed on the inner walls of the memorial to tell visitors of his ideals and values. If the memorial has still not succeeded in lifting up and illuminating Abraham Lincoln for its visitors, the inscription above his statue should remove all doubt. This inscription reads:

IN THIS TEMPLE  
AS IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE  
FOR WHOM HE SAVED THE UNION  
THE MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

IS ENSHRINED FOREVER  
(Ehrenhaus, pp. 47-48).

After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Congress passed legislation to establish a memorial to the passengers of United Airlines Flight 93, who “courageously gave their lives, thereby thwarting a planned attack on our Nation’s Capital.” The legislation places the Pennsylvania crash site within the National Park System and establishes a memorial for the passengers, excluding the terrorists on board whom “for the purposes of this act shall not be considered passengers or crew of that flight.” This legislation states that the crash site, which had already become an unofficial place of memorializing, “commemorates Flight 93 and is a profound symbol of American patriotism and spontaneous leadership of citizen-heroes” (107<sup>th</sup> Congress, Public Law 107-226). The decision to memorialize the passengers clearly shows the illumination of individuals because of their emerging esteemed values of “patriotism and spontaneous leadership.” Also, notice the use of the term “citizen-heroes.” These individuals are citizens, just like ourselves, but are at the same time above us as heroes.

Speeches that memorialize display similar epideictic functions. In President Reagan’s address to the nation after the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster, we see an emphasis on values exhibited by the crew. Reagan lifts up the crew by declaring that “We’ve forgotten the courage it took for the crew of the shuttle. But they, the Challenger Seven, were aware of the dangers, but overcame them and did their jobs brilliantly” (Reagan, p. 94). According to Reagan, the astronauts met challenges with joy, were brave pioneers, dedicated, and “pulled us into the future” (Reagan, p. 95). Through commemorating the crew, we are also feeling called to strive toward the values they

displayed. “The crew of the space shuttle Challenger honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives” (Reagan, p. 95).

Seventeen years later, President George W. Bush had to deliver a similar speech to the nation commenting on the loss of the Space Shuttle Columbia. Like Reagan, he highlights the astronauts’ bravery. “These men and women assumed great risk in the service to all humanity...these astronauts knew the dangers, and they faced them willingly, knowing they had a high and noble purpose in life” (Bush, Columbia remarks). Bush emphasizes the crew’s values, stating “because of their courage and daring and idealism, we will miss them all the more” (Bush, Columbia remarks). These values set them apart as deserving to be commemorated. The astronauts were unique and unlike the rest of us. Few exhibit the values shown by the crew of the Columbia, and that is why they will be missed “all the more.” They were truly examples for what we should strive.

A particular theme that I would like to draw out from the previous studies of memorialization is its power to create new perceptions or memories of the subject being memorialized. Whether those who create a particular piece of memorialization are speakers or architects designing marble structures, they have the power to shape these effects. Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush gave Americans a new understanding of the Challenger and Columbia astronauts. Their speeches framed the astronauts as brave and courageous heroes, and after the speeches our memories of them had been reshaped. In designing the Lincoln Memorial, designers and architects had a specific message they wanted to convey about Abraham Lincoln. Though their rhetoric is rendered in marble, it makes visitors to Washington remember Abraham Lincoln as a majestic, god-like figure who looks over the Union he helped preserve. The same is true of the Vietnam

Memorial. In designing the memorial, Maya Lin wanted to create an ambiguous monument that allowed visitors to have multiple interpretations about the war while at the same time illuminating the worth of the individual through the listing of the names of those killed or missing in action. Because of her intentions as rhetor, Maya Lin's memorial gives a particular message to visitors.

This concept of the rhetor shaping audience perceptions about individuals through memorialization is a key concept that I will address throughout this thesis. Through Brokaw's rhetoric, we accept his claim that the World War II generation is the greatest generation of individuals in American history. Accepting his claim is interesting because most of us have interacted or currently interact with these individuals. They are our parents and grandparents, friends and neighbors, or people we only briefly know. Through such interactions, we have already come to a predisposed understanding of these individuals. What Brokaw does through his memorialization of the World War II generation is to reshape and remold that understanding. He reeducates our understanding of who they are, but also our understanding of how we should remember them. To understand how Brokaw gives us a new memory and identity of the World War II generation in his books, I will analyze how he memorializes them in his two books.

The previous discussion of epideictic rhetoric and of certain examples of memorializing suggests that memorializing produces three main epideictic effects:

1. Memorializing radiates, illuminates, and lifts up whatever is being memorialized.
2. Memorializing illuminates and places an emphasis on values exhibited by its subject.

3. By placing an emphasis on values exhibited by the subject, we are also being instructed to adhere to those values.

These three main epideictic effects offer guidance for analyzing rhetoric that memorializes. In the next three chapters of this thesis, which comprise the body of this analysis, I will examine Tom Brokaw's *Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* according to these three main categories to better understand how he gives us a new identity and memory of the World War II generation. In each chapter of the analysis, I will focus on one of the main epideictic effects of memorializing and analyze how Brokaw's rhetoric produces that effect.

CHAPTER 3  
RADIATING, ILLUMINATING, AND LIFTING UP THE WORLD WAR II  
GENERATION

Throughout *The Greatest Generation*, Brokaw constructs narratives about members of the World War II generation. These characters become the focal point of his rhetoric. It is not the Depression or World War II that he wishes to tell his readers about as much as it is the individuals who lived through these events. Throughout these narratives, Brokaw strives to bolster his claim that these individuals are great. This chapter focuses on the first epideictic function of memorialization, the radiating, illuminating, and lifting up of the subject. The following analysis will show that while Brokaw performs this function, he is actively positing his claim that the World War II generation is great. After discussing the composition and importance of individual narratives, a pentadic analysis will be conducted. Within this analysis, the agent, members of the World War II generation, will be combined with the other components of the pentad to show that no matter what ratio is used, the outcome is always the same. This will show Brokaw's active role in crafting the narratives in a manner that the World War II generation is viewed as great regardless of the perspective they are viewed in.

In 1929, Erich Maria Remarque published one of the first as well as one of the most famous novels depicting modern warfare. Set during the First World War, *All Quiet on the Western Front* follows the service of Paul Baumer and his fellow soldiers on Europe's eastern front. The book reflects the cruel conditions of combat and educates its readers on the personal struggles of those who fought during the war. What is unique and surprising about the book is that its protagonist is a German soldier. By learning about

him and the struggles he and his comrades face, readers grow attached to the character and feel loss when he is killed in the end of the story. This feature of the story is a testament to the skill with which Remarque wrote this novel. It speaks a universal message. If one were to change all of the names of the characters to English or French names, the book would have the same impact. Although *All Quiet on the Western Front* was the first major novel dealing with modern warfare, it is equally famous for its ability to separate the war from the soldier.

The worth of the individual is also a key component of memorialization in Brokaw's books. He memorializes the World War II generation by telling stories of individual sacrifice. Rather than telling us about World War II from the standpoint of companies, regiments, and divisions, he tells us about it from the standpoint of Tom Broderick, Bob Bush, and Joe Foss. As with Remarque's novel, this individual perspective has distinct rhetorical advantages. First, this perspective makes the experience of war more real and tangible. While a large group would seem nebulous, individual experiences invite greater audience identification. Second, audiences are better able to focus their veneration and praise. Praise is easier to direct upon individuals than groups. Most importantly, by using individuals to define a generation, Brokaw can more easily create an identity for the World War II generation. While Remarque created the identity of a soldier during the First World War, Brokaw gives his audience a picture of the World War II generation. By discussing how Brokaw radiates, illuminates, and lifts up the World War II generation we begin to see his motive of creating their new identity and memory as the greatest generation in American history.

The way in which he achieves that motive is unique. His books are collections of narratives about this generation, which he has fashioned for us. Rather than explicitly telling us that they are great, he lets them tell us themselves by giving us stories about what they did and their thoughts about themselves and today's society. While Brokaw speaks the message, it is the voice of the World War II generation we hear—it is as if this generation is the true author of the book and Brokaw is merely the mediator. However, we must be careful to remember that while we hear the voices of this generation, it is ultimately Brokaw who is producing the rhetoric. Brokaw's narratives describe the actions of the World War II generation. His job as creator of the narrative is to tell us these stories in a way that makes this generation appear great. He selects what details to include and which to leave out so that through his stories, the agents are lifted up and illuminated. Taking this into account, the body of this chapter will be an analysis of Brokaw's narratives using Kenneth Burke's (1945) dramatic pentad as a tool of analysis.

According to Burke, a rhetorical motive is comprised of the five elements of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose (Burke, p. xv). Particular combined elements or ratios within a narrative may be particularly useful for understanding a rhetorical act. Burke gives one example, in this case of a scene/act ratio, in his discussion of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*. He states that "in this work written at the very height of Ibsen's realistic period, we can see how readily realism leads into symbolism" (Burke, p. 3). The scene or the world surrounding Ibsen, influenced his work. Burke also discusses Scene/Agent ratios when discussing Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. In these, Burke points out

how “the correlation between the quality of the country and the quality of its inhabitants is here presented in quite secular terms” (Burke, pp. 7-8).

In Mari Boor Tonn, Valerie A. Endress, and John N. Diamond’s (1993) article *Hunting and Heritage on Trial: A Dramatistic Debate Over Tragedy, Tradition, and Territory* they discuss how an act can be dominated by scene so that narratives “reflect a perspective that is committed to viewing the world as relatively permanent and deterministic” making the “persons functioning within the scene regarded as seriously constrained by scenic elements” (Tonn, Endress, & Diamond, p. 166). This is in contrast to an act dominated by agent which reveals “a perspective that views agents as rational and reality as constructed or caused by human choices” (Tonn, Endress, & Diamond, p. 166). This aspect of an agent dominated ratio is important. In Brokaw’s books, he is positing the World War II generation as the greatest generation. In doing this, he presents them as the dominant agents within his recounting of history. After discussing why Brokaw felt compelled to memorialize the World War II generation, I will look at the following four ratios within Brokaw’s narratives: agent/act, agent/agency, agent/scene, and agent/purpose. The following pentadic analysis of Brokaw’s books will show that rather than arriving at differing conclusions or results from each ratio, the conclusions and results are always the same, the World War II generation is great. Normally, different conclusions or results are derived when using different ratios. However, Brokaw wants his readers to view the World War II generation as great no matter how you view them or what lens you use to analyze them.

Brokaw felt a need to celebrate the World War II generation after covering the 40<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the invasion of Normandy for NBC. This work in France

opened his understanding of this generation, and caused him to realize that this blind spot in the American memory was more general. But why were the histories and stories of the lives of the World War II generation unknown? Brokaw, who grew up in postwar America, states that he “cannot recall any of the veterans sitting around telling war stories. It just wasn’t done” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 69). Throughout Brokaw’s books, the silence of the World War II veterans concerning their war experiences is thematic. Brokaw quotes a veteran by the name of James Dowling who states:

After we got back, people didn’t talk about it and you didn’t ask, even if they were in the same age group and likely served in the war. I didn’t know until a few years ago that one of my Little League coaches had been in an air raid that I knew of; it was just like that (Brokaw, 1998, p. 52).

Dowling continues:

It didn’t really become important to talk about until we were in our sixties. When I went back to the site of our prison camp [where Dowling was kept as a POW], I started opening up with my wife and family a little more. I felt I could, because other guys were there. But my pilot would never talk to his wife about it. And two members of our crew, when we tried to get them to reunions, they just didn’t want to relive it, I guess (Brokaw, 1998, p. 52).

For many, the war was too intense and painful to relive in this way. They chose to put those years behind them, to treat these experiences as mere interruptions in their lives. Though they may have been shaped and molded by the war, they considered it only a small part of their lifetime and a part on which they did not wish to dwell.

In addition to the merely personal aversion to reliving war there may also be normative reasons for this silence in veterans’ sense of duty and country. To them, service in Europe and the Pacific was simply an obligation. To defend freedom from tyranny was simply their job. Thus, former President George Bush says of his service, it was “truly an honor” to serve his country as well as an “obligation of citizenship that

requires no additional reward” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 276). Any sane person would do it. Selflessness and humbleness as well as modesty and public responsibility emerge from this, qualities that Bush says his mother taught him at an early age (Brokaw, 1998, p. 273).

The recognition that World War II veterans would not talk about the war suggested to Brokaw that those not belonging to the World War II generation ought to assume the responsibility of educating their country about their deeds. Only after traveling to France twice to cover D-Day anniversaries and after countless interviews with veterans who would open up their past only with his constant pleading, was he himself able to learn about their experiences. If it was this difficult for the lead news anchor for a major television network to get information about the World War II generation, how much more difficult would it be for ordinary people? Brokaw seemed to assume that his privileged role put upon him a special responsibility to tell about the World War II generation, and thus he reports the information that was gathered through his numerous interviews and research. Through his research, experiences, interviews, and letters, he has come to the conclusion that the World War II generation is the greatest generation of individuals in American history. This attribution not only memorializes them, but also shapes the memory for readers of the present generation.

The first thing that Brokaw needed to do in order to memorialize the World War II generation was to show us who they are. Instead of being famous, most of them “are more like your neighbors” (Brokaw, 1998, p. xxx). Their identity and our memories of them are formed through our current experiences with them. We know them by looking at where they are now instead of where they have been, as Brokaw would want us to do.

He illustrates this by stating that it was not until years after meeting his future father-in-law that he realized the important role he played as a front-line doctor in the army's 34<sup>th</sup> Regiment and that he left the war with the rank of major (Brokaw, 1998, p. xviii). Without illumination, members of the World War II generation would remain hidden. Being hidden among us, they could not be praised or memorialized.

### **Agent/Act**

Keeping in mind that Brokaw is using the voice of the World War II generation to speak his own message and pursue his motive of memorializing them as the greatest generation in American history, the agents are the members of the World War II generation as constructed in these narratives, and the acts are what they do in those narratives. How do the acts within Brokaw's narratives lift up and illuminate their agents? Given that it is a book about World War II veterans, one would assume that there would be many stories about combat. This is true, but as we will see later, the World War II generation is lifted up by actions outside of the war as well. In a section of *The Greatest Generation* titled "Heroes," he tells the stories of three veterans, two of whom were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. The first, Joe Foss, was inspired to become a pilot after watching Charles Lindbergh on a nation-wide tour. After working his way through college and flying lessons he enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1940. In the fall of 1942, Foss was shipped out to Guadalcanal where he led a squadron of Marine F4F-4 Wildcat fighters. In little over a month, Foss shot down twenty-three Japanese aircraft. In one particular dogfight with a Japanese fighter, Foss's plane was hit by enemy fire. "He had three Zeroes [Japanese fighters] on his tail as he went into a steep

dive and then a big, wide turn, trying to get back to Henderson Field with a dead engine and his propeller free-wheeling” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 117). Foss landed his plane at full speed with virtually no control, barely missing a grove of large palm trees. After the event, the ground crew counted more than two hundred bullet holes in his plane (Brokaw, 1998, p. 117). This act was exciting, but it was not what earned Foss the Medal of Honor. Brokaw discusses other examples of Foss’s actions, including how he was shot down, forced to ditch his plane at sea, swam in the Pacific for twelve hours until rescued by island natives, and was back in the air two days later (Brokaw, 1998, p. 118). The act that won him the Medal of Honor was a maneuver he performed while his squadron was attacking a Japanese battleship. To draw the fire away from the attacking American planes, Foss drove his plane directly toward the battleship. He dove upon the ship from directly above, guessing that that angle would make it difficult for the ship’s guns to fire upon him. Foss maintained his dive until the last possible moment. When he finally pulled up, he was so close to the ship that he could see the Japanese officers on the bridge. The diversion successfully drew fire away from the American planes, which enabled them to torpedo the ship (Brokaw, 1998, p. 118).

By telling us about the actions of Joe Foss, Brokaw illuminates him. He is a hero because of what he did. These are not actions that ordinary individuals normally do. They are heroic, courageous, and deemed worthy enough to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. By telling us about Foss’s actions, he is lifted up above the rest of us who have not done similar actions. Foss later commented “combat is dangerous...it tends to interrupt your breathing process” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 122).

Yet, Brokaw does not end his narrative with Foss coming home from the war. He continues to follow him in the postwar years. Foss later went into politics, becoming governor of South Dakota, and was even offered \$750,000 for the screen rights to turn his war experiences into a major motion picture starring John Wayne as Foss. He turned down the offer because the film would have invented many features, such as a love story, while diminishing the harsh realities of war. Foss would rather not have John Wayne assume his identity than give Americans an inaccurate depiction of what the war was like in the Pacific theater (Brokaw, 1998, p. 122). Of note is Brokaw's decision to include this aspect of Foss's story because it is not about courage or sacrifice, the traditional virtues of the warrior. Rather, it is about propriety. Many of us would relish the self-gratification of having a major Hollywood actor or actress portray us in film. However, Foss was more concerned about larger issues of truthfulness than he was about his own advancement. He would rather keep the public from receiving a false reality of the war, even if that meant keeping him in obscurity. Yet, because Brokaw has informed us of this action, Foss is lifted out of obscurity. Brokaw shows us that Foss is selfless and puts the welfare of others above himself.

In the narrative about Foss, we can see how Brokaw tries to salvage some of the actions Foss did. There are things that Foss did, such as loosing a U.S. House of Representatives to George McGovern and divorcing his wife. These are acts that cannot be left out of Foss's life. Let us look at the way Brokaw paints these acts. Foss lost to a politician who later went on to be crushed by Nixon in the 1972 Presidential race. One possible way of looking at this is that Foss was not a good politician because he lost to a big loser. However, Brokaw paints a different picture. He builds up George McGovern

as a distinguished member of the World War II generation to make it look like Foss lost to a gallant opponent. He tells us how McGovern “won one of the military’s most coveted awards, the Distinguished Flying Cross, as a B-24 bomber pilot in the European theater,” “was as self-effacing as Foss was bold,” and “was a much better politician, with a strong sense of his political beliefs and an ability to articulate them” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 121). By painting McGovern this way, Foss does not look diminished because he lost to him in a campaign. Also, Foss got a divorce, something that Brokaw describes throughout his book as being anomalous for the World War II generation. How does Brokaw salvage this? He tells us that after the divorce, Foss “became an enthusiastic born-again Christian,” which made him completely unlike the “absentee father and husband [he had been] for much of his first marriage” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 122). Even though Foss did things that might not seem virtuous to some, Brokaw is still able to lift him up by painting these acts in a favorable or unique way.

Charles Van Gorder, another member of the World War II generation whose actions Brokaw lifts up, volunteered to be part of a two-team surgical unit assigned to the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne during the initial hours of D-Day. This surgical unit set up medical facilities in the middle of the fighting, instead of safely behind the frontlines. The rationale was that since there were bound to be high casualties, saving lives would require that doctors be placed as close to the wounded as possible. Within hours of landing with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne on the morning of June 6, 1944, Van Gorder and his fellow doctors had set up an operating facility on the grounds of a French chateau, a primitive version of the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital unit employed more formally during the Korean War and made famous by the film and television series *M.A.S.H.*. The

doctors operated continuously for thirty-six hours, wearing their helmets during surgery because they were often in the line of fire. Van Gorder was so exhausted that during one surgery his head fell down into an open abdomen, prompting him to be ordered to rest (Brokaw, 1998, p. 28). Van Gorder credits several cases of Scotch whiskey issued by the Army as “the only thing that kept us going” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 28).

Brokaw sheds light onto these actions by giving details of how they shaped Van Gorder. He tells us how the war made this medic “a better doctor because [he] had to do all kinds of surgery...there were no trauma surgery books before the war to learn from” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 28). Here, Brokaw stresses how Van Gorder’s actions made him a better person. If he had not gone through the war, he would not be as good of a doctor. His actions shaped him into who he became.

Van Gorder’s experiences treating patients during intense battles continued after the invasion of Normandy. In December of 1944, he and a colleague were operating on patients when heavy German fire came through their tent. At times, they were lying on their stomachs while operating on patients to avoid being hit (Brokaw, 1998, p. 28). Van Gorder and his colleague were later taken prisoners of war by the Germans and forced to operate on enemy soldiers. They struggled to stay alive through their internment and escaped while being transferred in Poland. They slowly made their way across the Polish countryside, stopping at Polish hospitals along the way to provide their services, and finally made their way back to American lines in the spring of 1945 (Brokaw, 1998, p. 31). Brokaw shows us how all of these experiences shaped who Van Gorder is. After the war, he moved to rural North Carolina and set up a small medical practice. As Brokaw states, Van Gorder became part of a “new generation of Good Samaritans...who have

been so intensely exposed to such inhumanity” that “they will devote their lives to good works” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 25). Through the narrative of this doctor, Brokaw stresses actions that made him the heroic and humane Good Samaritan. Choosing this individual also makes us see that an underlying theme of war is the preservation of life. Brokaw helps us see how the Allies’ ultimate purpose was to preserve life by illuminating and lifting up the life of one such soldier.

### **Agent/Agency**

Agency describes the means by which an agent performs an act. By looking at the agent/agency ratio within Brokaw’s narratives, we can see how he memorializes the World War II generation by describing the means by which they performed their actions. Looking back at the discussion of Joe Foss, we can see how Brokaw tells us how Foss became a pilot. He made his way through college and flying lessons by working at a gas station. This is what enabled Foss to become a fighter pilot, to shoot down over twenty Japanese planes, and to perform daring maneuvers.

Margaret Ray Ringenberg is someone who Brokaw lifts up and illuminates because of the means through which she helped fight in World War II. She was a member of the Women’s Air Force Service Pilots (WASP), who were responsible for vital domestic flying duties. Even though they did not serve overseas, thirty-eight WASPs died in the line of duty (Brokaw, 1998, p. 163). Flying airplanes was a male dominated profession and this posed difficulties for Ringenberg. After graduating from high school, she started taking flying lessons at a local airfield and earned her pilot’s license by the age of twenty-one. Shortly afterwards, she was recruited by the WASPs

and began six months of rigorous training in various military aircraft. She was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ferrying Division at Wilmington, Delaware where she tested and transported planes that would later be used in combat (Brokaw, 1998, p. 165). When the war ended and the WASPs were no longer needed, Ringenberg was determined to stay in the air. She decided to become a flight instructor, but had to overcome the resistance of students not wanting to take lessons from a woman. Resorting to a desk job at a local airfield and directing and fueling planes, she patiently waited for opportunities. Those opportunities came when other instructors did not show up for student' s lessons and she would give the lessons instead. Once the student was alone in a cockpit with her, she would use her skills and techniques to win them over. After one lesson with Ringenberg as their substitute instructor, most decided to keep her permanently.

Margaret Ray Ringenberg contributed to the war effort through her service as a pilot. However, the means by which she was able to perform this act were extremely difficult. Brokaw brings to our attention that in order to perform this service she had to overcome several obstacles. She was a woman in a male dominated profession. She had to overcome adversity to first become a pilot and then to remain one. As Brokaw states, "all of the military and political leaders of World War II were white males, sharing the attendant attitudes characteristic of their gender at the time" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 163). For this reason, Ringenberg is praised. She is not lauded for just being a pilot. She is praised for how she became and stayed a pilot. In this situation, Brokaw lifts up Ringenberg from not only the rest of us, but also from ordinary pilots as well. We can notice how Brokaw constructs these narratives in a way that makes the obstacles Ringenberg faced seem to have been constructed by those outside of the World War II generation. Instead

of stating that people her own age made it difficult for her, he uses terms such as “the military and political leaders” and the “profession” of aviation. As we have seen in many of Brokaw’s narratives, there were many young officers in the military and many of these “military leaders” would have been the ones who created obstacles for Ringenberg. Yet, Brokaw seems to paint these obstacles in a way that makes them seem like a nebulous force outside the World War II generation.

Johnnie Holmes also overcame adversity in order to perform his duties. Holmes was part of the 761<sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion. During the war, the soldiers of this battalion had performed in an exemplary way, earning 8 Silver Stars, 62 Bronze Stars, and 296 Purple Hearts (Brokaw, 1998, p. 198). However, this service is not what Brokaw stresses in his narrative. Instead, he focuses on the fact that Holmes served in an all black battalion. He prefaces all of the details of Holmes’ service in Europe with a narrative about how he came to be able to serve. During training, Holmes was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky and later Camp Claiborne, Louisiana where “all of the noncommissioned officers were white southerners” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 195). Basic training was made more difficult for black soldiers and Holmes remembers instances where dentists on base “experimented” on him by strapping him in the dentist chair and drilling on teeth without the use of Novocain (Brokaw, 1998, p. 195). Holmes also remembers German POW’s kept at Camp Claiborne having more rights and privileges than he and his black colleagues who served in the US military. He was constantly discriminated against, and one of his personal friends and fellow black soldier was even murdered near an all-white neighborhood close to the base (Brokaw, 1998, p. 195).

As Brokaw states, “any accounting of the war years is incomplete without the stories of those who were serving their country while fighting to protect their individual rights” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 183). Accordingly, the section of the book that contains this narrative is titled “Shame.” The obstacles Holmes had to overcome in order to serve in World War II are the tools by which Brokaw illuminates and lifts up Holmes. Although Holmes served his country brilliantly, Brokaw wishes to show us what he endured in order to perform those actions. By doing this, Holmes is lifted up not only from the rest of us, but also from ordinary soldiers as well. Through this narrative, Brokaw creates a memory for us of black soldiers who had to fight a war on two fronts, home and abroad. Rather than leaving us with the memory of valiant service in combat performed by black soldiers during World War II, he leaves us with the memory of the struggles they faced before they were ever sent overseas.

Brokaw performs a similar function with Holmes’s narrative as he does with Ringenberg’s narrative. No mention is made of the fact that this was the generation of white, southern racists. Rather, they are viewed as an outside force. No doubt there were some who were the within the same age group as Holmes, but Brokaw leaves out this information. In this instance we can see how Brokaw leaves out information when he creates his narratives. We are left with an image of Holmes confronting racism rather than people his same age who are racist.

### **Agent/Scene**

As a collection of stories about World War II veterans, *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* shed light onto the scenes where their agents carried

out their actions. Looking at the agent/scene ratio within the narratives helps us see how the World War II generation's setting justifies their memorialization. Brokaw stresses how primitive combat was in World War II without today's many technological advances. When an American pilot was downed during the NATO bombing raids on Serbia, not only were elite search-and-rescue teams able to locate and pick up the pilot, but also the whole operation was monitored from the Pentagon thousands of miles away (Brokaw, 1999, p. 3). Brokaw describes these more recent communication advances to create a drastic contrast to the experiences of Clarence M. Graham. Graham was one of many Americans trapped on the island of Corregidor in the Philippines at the beginning of the war. He was taken prisoner by the Japanese in May 1942 and sent to Japan to work in a coal mine across the bay from Nagasaki. Like most POWs captured from Corregidor, Graham was malnourished and wounded as he was sent off to the Japanese labor camps. These American POWs were tortured and barely kept alive on rations. Those who were not murdered or who did not die of disease and starvation worked in a condemned lateral of the Fukuoka coal mine in Japan (Brokaw, 1999, p. 4). The POW's wore only loincloths and did labor that was deemed unsafe and too dangerous for Japanese workers. As Graham remembers, "sometimes I got to coughing so bad that I would take off my whole wardrobe and wrap it around my face so I could breathe" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 5). After the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the guards became very brutal on the Americans, refusing to feed them and threatening to kill them if they even spoke. Graham remembers air raid sirens going off and being ordered into makeshift trenches, so that the Japanese would not lose their valuable slave labor. The "all clear" siren blew and he saw a B-29 through an opening in the clouds. For the next

three paragraphs, Graham gives us an eyewitness account with vivid details of the dropping of the second atomic bomb being dropped on Nagasaki across the bay from his POW camp.

Brokaw introduces Graham's narrative by stating, "for the next three and a half years he worked in the mine and then, one day in the summer of 1945, he was witness to a historic event" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 4). Graham is illuminated because of where he was during the war. Brokaw does not have to tell us about Graham's actions in the coalmines. Simply enduring the harsh conditions is enough to illuminate him. The setting of the POW camp gives us enough reason to illuminate Graham. As he recalls, "I kept my faith pretty high, because so many just gave up..and you couldn't..you had to have inner drive, or you'd just die" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 5). He did not give up. Though constrained by his surroundings, Graham is praised for persevering in this setting. Furthermore, he is illuminated for having witnessed the explosion of the second atomic bomb.

To Brokaw, setting plays an important role in lifting up the World War II generation. In *The Greatest Generation*, he devotes an entire chapter, titled "The Time of Their Lives," to discuss the setting surrounding this generation. As he states:

The year of my birth, 1940, was the fulcrum of America in the twentieth century, when the nation was balanced precariously between the darkness of the Great Depression on one side and the storms of war in Europe and the Pacific on the other. It was a critical time in the shaping of this nation and the world, equal to the revolution of 1776 and the perils of the Civil War (Brokaw, 1998, p. 3).

He points out that many in the World War II generation were born or grew up during the roaring 1920's when there seemed to be much promise and prosperity for their futures. However, the Great Depression shattered the prospects of a bright future. These children and teenagers, found themselves in a situation they were forced to confront. Droughts

were widespread and farmers were barely able to produce enough food to sustain their families, much less to sell in a depressed market. Just as America was beginning to climb out of the depression in the late 1930's, flames of war were beginning to surface in Europe and Asia. Not even having time to enjoy a recovering America, this generation had to turn its focus to fighting a war overseas (Brokaw, 1998, pp. 5-7).

A theme that Brokaw tries to advance here is that these individuals were placed in settings that they did not create. They were only children and teenagers when the depression hit, and the call to arms was created by foreign powers. Yet, these individuals not only made the best of what was handed to them but exemplified the best of their natures in these situations. They worked tirelessly during the depression and helped bring their families through it. They then went off to fight a war that was not of their making but was their responsibility to bring to an end. Brokaw stresses that for this generation, the times in which they lived provided them with the experiences and opportunities that shaped and molded them into "the greatest generation."

Andy Rooney, who wrote for the *Stars and Stripes* during the war, estimates that ninety percent of those in uniform in World War II were nowhere near the fighting (Brokaw, 1998, p. 296). Yet, after reading *The Greatest Generation* one would believe that most veterans saw intense fighting. Brokaw chooses stories of people in extreme situations to paint a picture of the entire generation. Most veterans were not POW's. Just as he chooses stories of people who performed courageous actions, he chooses stories of people who were in extreme locations.

## **Agent/Purpose**

Why did this generation serve in World War II? What drove them to take up arms? A simple answer is to ensure liberty and freedom as well as to put down tyranny. However, we need to dig deeper to find more specific reasons. By examining the agent/purpose ratio in Brokaw's narratives, we can see the driving forces that caused the World War II generation to take part in the war lift up and illuminate them for memorialization. First and foremost among these was duty. Former President Bush told Brokaw that his service was "an obligation of citizenship that requires no additional reward" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 276). When asked if America owes his generation for their service he replied, "What are we 'owed'? Nothing. Not one damn thing" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 276). To Bush, service in the war was seen as a necessity. Oddly enough, this message, which is prominently depicted in the narrative about Bush, contradicts Andy Rooney who says that the American Legion and the VFW "expect too much" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 296). Brokaw has to be true to Rooney and give us his true opinions about veterans. However, Rooney's opinion is not given until near the end of the book, after President Bush's views have been made. Rooney is a World War II veteran who is in agreement with Bush in that they are not owed anything. Also, Brokaw paints Rooney and his views in a way that makes him appear as humble and modest instead of having a legitimate point about veterans demanding things from the government. After all, it is veteran organizations that are leading the push to establish a World War II memorial (Wilborn, p. 1).

Harold W. Duket wrote a letter to Brokaw that is printed in *The Greatest Generation Speaks*. In this letter, he tells about attending Memorial Day services in a

small town in Wisconsin. As was his custom, he wore his wartime jacket with patches and ribbons and a cap that he had worn while overseas. As he was leaving the ceremony, a Vietnam veteran came up to him and said “I saw you in your uniform and I just wanted to say thank you” (Brokaw, 1999, p. 168). Not until later that day did Duket realize the veteran was not thanking him for attending the service, but thanking him for his service in World War II. Duket comments in his letter to Brokaw that “I must say that this is the first time anyone ever said thank you for what we assumed was just our duty and obligation” (Brokaw, 1999, p. 168). Brokaw wants to make it clear that the reason why Duket did not immediately realize that he was being thanked for his service in the war is because he was not expecting to be thanked for what he did. You are not usually thanked for something you are *supposed* to do and to Duket, he was *supposed* to serve. Why is it that duty and obligation illuminate someone? The reason suggested by Brokaw in those two narratives is that we do not necessarily have the same mind set as Bush and Duket about their service in the war. If we also believed that serving in World War II was an obligation, Brokaw would not need to stress that viewpoint. The concept would be merely implicit. The veterans are illuminated and lifted up because this concept, which is inherent to their character, but not ours, magnifies the veterans humility, chivalry, and selflessness.

Brokaw also tells the story of a Navy medic by the name of Bob Bush. Just before being sent overseas, he told his mother “I’m going into the service to help people, not to kill them” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 105). Bush was among the first Marines to go ashore at Okinawa, the location of some of the fiercest fighting in the Pacific theater. Bush was constantly aiding wounded Marines and was called to help a Marine officer gravely

wounded in open territory on the top of a ridge. Without hesitating, Bush went directly to the Marine and began administering plasma while the Japanese were attacking the position. While holding the plasma bottle high to administer it to the soldier, he drew his pistol and began firing on oncoming Japanese. When the pistol's ammunition was depleted, he grabbed a nearby discarded rifle and continued firing at point-blank range. Despite being personally wounded and losing one eye, Bush killed six advancing Japanese, wounded several others, successfully evacuated the Marine, and did not receive aid for himself until he collapsed from his wounds safe behind U.S. lines (Brokaw, 1998, p. 108). This action earned Bush a Congressional Medal of Honor, but more important to Brokaw's purposes is why he did it. Brokaw accentuates purpose/agent ratio by describing a ceremony for Medal of Honor winners in Washington. There, Former President Harry Truman recalled that his favorite Medal of Honor winner "was a young man from the West Coast who had promised his mother that he was going into the service to help people, not kill them" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 112). Brokaw uses the uncoerced testimony of Truman to lift up and illuminate the extent to which Bush's character is shaped by principles of purpose.

Brokaw's narratives, create an identity even as they renew our memory of members of the World War II generation. Most of these are people we have never heard of, and so by constructing their narratives he lifts them up out of obscurity. Burke's pentad, when used to analyze Brokaw's narratives, helps us see exactly how he lifts up and illuminates members of the World War II generation by showing how Brokaw paints the act, agency, scene, and purpose within his narratives. In this way we see not only how he lifts them up and illuminate them, but also how he influences our perception of

them. Pentadic analysis brings out the argument embedded in the telling of those stories; we can see how Brokaw memorializes the World War II generation by lifting and illuminating them as agents in relation to the act, agency, scene, and purpose within those stories. Ultimately, Brokaw as rhetor determines how the narratives are told, what exactly is being memorialized, and the image and memory of the World War II generation that is perceived by his audience. This shows the active role Brokaw plays in crafting the narratives and positing his claim that the World War II generation is great. It is his aim to show that no matter what perspective they are viewed in, they will always stand above other Americans.

## CHAPTER 4

### PLACING AN EMPHASIS ON THE VALUES EXHIBITED BY THE WORLD WAR

#### II GENERATION

The previous chapter discussed how Brokaw memorializes individuals by looking at the purpose behind their actions. For example, Bob Bush is praised not only for what he did but also for why he did it. By memorializing why somebody did something, one gets a clearer understanding of who that individual really is. Tom Brokaw focuses on the “why” throughout his rhetoric. He frames heroic actions within larger narratives about individuals, praising individuals before as well as after heroic actions to show that these events signify some larger whole. Once the reader is shown the person’s entire life we are not surprised that they should have performed heroic actions. Praising people’s lives allows him to shed light on their inner being. The most important aspect of that inner being is the values they exhibit. These values operate like a compass, directing their choices.

In this chapter, I wish to look at some of these values he emphasizes and how he discusses their presence within the World War II generation in a way that makes them identify with them as the greatest generation. While analyzing *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, careful attention was paid to dominant themes that ran throughout the books. These dominant themes will serve as the values that will be discussed in this chapter. This analysis will show how Brokaw shapes the World War II generation identity by showing his audience that they exhibited exceptional values. He is careful to show their virtues, while at the same time neglecting their vices.

Brokaw's claim is that the World War II generation is the "greatest generation." This is significant in terms of epideictic rhetoric because not only are they being lifted up, but also they are being lifted up above other generations. It is a comparative epideictic in that while discussing values, we are shown how they are expressed exceptionally and more fully in the World War II generation than in the generations that followed. As we have seen, memorializing has the effect of lifting up, radiating, and illuminating its subject. If Brokaw's claims hold true, then the World War II generation comes to be viewed as higher and brighter than any other generation in American history. He cannot say that they are merely good people. He must say that they are the best in order for them to be viewed as the best examples for us to emulate. We constantly strive to become better than we already are. Role models are usually not ordinary people who are exactly like we are. Rather, role models are usually people deemed better than us and worthy of emulation. If the World War II generation is not deemed the "greatest generation," then it could be argued that there are others who are greater that we should emulate. As the greatest, they represent the epitome of how life should be lived.

Brokaw tells us that "the sad reality is that they are dying at an ever faster pace" (Brokaw, 1998, p. xxx). In giving us this information, he is telling us that we should do several things before they leave us. Once they are gone, we will have lost the opportunity to not only thank them for their service, but to also learn from them. As we will see later, Brokaw feels that there are lapses between the characters of the World War II generation and subsequent generations. It is by looking at these lapses that we can see values exceptionally exhibited by the World War II generation and how the world would be a better place if everybody else exhibited these values in the same way. However, once the

World War II generation is gone, there will no longer be a reference point by which to judge subsequent generations within society. In describing the World War II generation as the greatest generation, Brokaw makes reference to the way they possess certain values.

Barry Schwartz's (2000) examination of memorials to Abraham Lincoln in the decades of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century shows how a new identity and memory can be fashioned in accordance with political exigency. The progressives wanted a vehicle that would embody their movement and they fashioned that vehicle out of Lincoln. According to Schwartz, progressives recreated Lincoln as a "man of the people" by emphasizing particular characteristics (Schwartz, p. 24). By stressing how he once lived in a humble log cabin, the progressives removed Lincoln from the middle-upper class. Stephen Browne (1999) found a similar effect in his study of Crispus Attucks where he found that commemoration of Attucks shifted from symbolizing resistance to racial accommodation. John Adams served as a lawyer for the British monarchy during the murder trial of the soldiers who shot Attucks. During that trial, Adams defended the soldiers by calling attention to Attucks' "mad behavior" and said that he was a horrible individual "whose very looks was enough to terrify any person" (*Africans in America*, p. 1). However, as years passed, Attucks' identity changed to that of being the first casualty of the American Revolution.

Brokaw attempts to do something similar with the World War II generation. His emphasis on how this generation exemplifies specific values fashions them into a generation that stands above all others in American history. In this chapter, I will analyze some of the values that Brokaw praises the World War II generation for expressing

exceptionally. In doing this, I will show how he reshapes memory of that generation. This created identity is the one memorialized. By creating the identity and memory of those he memorializes, he is able to better bolster his claim that they are the greatest generation.

As Brokaw praises the virtues of the World War II generation, he is at the same time being selective, emphasizing certain values like work ethic and commitment to create a new identity for that generation. This identity is linked only to the virtues this generation. Its vices, as Brokaw discusses in the section titled “Shame,” are treated as if they were outside of the boundaries of this generation. Thus, even though the horrible conditions of segregation and racism created by those belonging to the same generation, they are removed to a different realm, one outside that occupied by his subjects.

### **Modesty**

Modesty is a value that Brokaw frequently emphasizes in *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks*. As discussed in the previous chapter, Brokaw emphasizes the common unwillingness of World War II veterans to talk about their war experiences. In part, this may be because the memories of combat are so traumatic. However, Brokaw emphasizes modesty as an alternative explanation for this silence. Former President George Bush is one member of the World War II generation that Brokaw praises for his modesty. Looking back at his vice presidency during the Reagan administration, one can not help but notice how “next to Reagan, Bush always looked a little like the younger kid, wide-eyed with hero worship” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 275). In actuality, Bush’s wartime experiences were more eventful than those of Reagan. Brokaw’s narrative does not show us that Bush wishes to leave horrific experiences in the

past or that he does not want to remind himself of terrible memories. Bush's reticence instead reflects the fact that he has lived by the precept that you "don't brag" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 273). Modesty is the value of not esteeming oneself above others, and Brokaw emphasizes how Bush's experiences during the war strengthened his humbleness. One of Bush's assignments during the war was to read the outgoing mail of the enlisted soldiers to make sure no sensitive military information was inadvertently included. As he read the other soldier's letters, he learned more about them and the lives they lived. He learned that the people he only saw in passing had families, lives, and ambitions. Through this duty, he got to know them personally. Even though he was from a privileged family in Connecticut, he soon found that he was truly no different than the rest of the soldiers with whom he served.

By using Bush as his subject, Brokaw highlights the modesty of this generation by a kind of a *fortiori* argument. One might think that a former president from a privileged household would be the last person to display modesty. However, Brokaw presents him merely as another member of the World War II generation. He creates this identity for Bush by placing him in a war with people from many different backgrounds where neither his family nor his presidency defines him. Praising Bush through the framework of World War II constructs him as a modest veteran and public servant. Although Brokaw briefly emphasizes the modesty exhibited by the World War II generation in various passages of his books, not as much time is devoted to this value in other narratives as in the narrative about Bush. Because Bush is a public figure often characterized as being from the upper echelon of society, he works especially well as an

exemplar of this generation's modesty. If readers are made to believe that famous people are modest, it is easy for them to believe that unknown people are as well.

By emphasizing the presence of modesty in his narratives, Brokaw also argues from example that Bush and fellow members of the World War II generation are modest. By carefully explaining in detail why one of the most privileged members of that generation is humble, we are given reason to suppose that all its members are humble.

Brokaw claims that some of the modesty exhibited by those of the World War II generation stems from embarrassment of being singled out (Brokaw, 1998, p. 103). They feel that they are a community. When Mary Louise Roberts Wilson received the Silver Star for heroism, she said, "certainly I am proud of it, but others deserve credit too. Everybody in our group deserved the medal" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 178). In Brokaw's story about the heroic pilot Bob Bush at a reception for Congressional Medal of Honor recipients, he points out that when Harry Truman described Bush as his favorite Medal of Honor recipient during a speech, Bush did nothing to draw attention to himself. At the end of the reception, as Bush was introducing his son to the former president, he did not tell Truman that he was the man referred to in his speech (Brokaw, 1998, p. 112). Roderick Berry, who spent most of the war in Hawaii maintaining radio communications, tells Brokaw that he does not really consider himself worthy of belonging to a group called "the greatest generation" even though he has many people tell him that he is. Even though people outside his generation characterize him as part of "the greatest generation" he is reluctant to be labeled "great."

In arguing that the World War II generation is the greatest generation Brokaw takes on the role of a teacher, educating us about its actors. By emphasizing this

generation's modesty, he provides an excuse for our ignorance of this generation's prowess and a reason why he must instruct us about them. He subtly explains that they have always been great but nobody ever knew because they were modest and never talked about it. By praising the World War II generation's modesty, he gives his audience the impression that they do not truly know the extent of these people's existence. Because they are modest, they do not tell people about themselves. People must rely on individuals like Brokaw to be fully educated. Once the audience acknowledges the modesty and turns to Brokaw to learn about these individuals more fully, he can create the identity he wants his audience to accept.

### **Work Ethic**

Living through the Great Depression, the World War II generation truly knew the meaning of the word "work." Times were harsh and money was scarce. Those who lived on farms were barely able to produce enough food for themselves, much less enough to take to market. Many left their farms and went to urban areas to search for employment, only to find that job availability and quality of life was not much better. Brokaw claims that the work ethic learned during the depression and exhibited throughout the lives of the World War II generation is one of the things that make them great. Throughout his narrative, he emphasizes the work ethic they had before, during, and after the war.

Charles Briscoe grew up on a farm in Kansas during the depression. By the time he reached seventh grade, he was already plowing fields with a team of horses. He comments that one of the happiest days of his life was when his father came home with wheels and a seat for the plow. On another occasion, his mother needed dental work, but the family could not afford the cost of going to a dentist. Briscoe went to the dentist and

offered to work for him in exchange for the work she needed. The dentist agreed and Briscoe did such a good job that he was permanently hired. However, Briscoe's job did not put any money into his own pocket. As he recalls, "after any of us children got to a certain age we started working and never kept a paycheck. It all went into the family kitty" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 90).

Brokaw's narrative about Charles Briscoe calls our attention to the fact that he was plowing fields with a team of horses when he was in the seventh grade, but does not dwell upon him being so young. Having this responsibility and doing this type of work at such a young age is something that could have easily been expounded upon. This understatement is significant. If Brokaw simply mentions it instead of dwelling on it, the audience perceives that it was normal for a seventh grader to do this type of work. Furthermore, he does not state that one of the happiest days in Briscoe's life was not when he was relieved of his plowing duties or when his father got a tractor, but when his father got wheels and a seat for a plow, which enabled Briscoe to continue doing his job, but now with some limited ease and comfort. This indirectly illustrates that Briscoe never questioned his duty of plowing the fields. Again, there is a subtle emphasis in Brokaw's description. If his father came home with a seat and wheels for his son to use while plowing the fields, this means that his father was not plowing the fields with him. This does not mean that his father was not working himself. Rather, while his father was doing something more important, he could trust his son to plow the fields by himself without any supervision.

Throughout Brokaw's description of Briscoe, he never mentions him complaining. Working at an early age was simply a necessity. The description about his

mother needing dental work also shows us Briscoe's work ethic. In relating this instance, Brokaw does not describe the act as one of kindness or sacrifice. Instead, he places it within the framework of the family. Briscoe saw himself as part of a family rather than as an individual. His mother's dental work was not seen as something that she needed herself, but something the family needed. Thus, Briscoe's working for the dentist is perceived not as love or sacrifice, but working to help the family survive. This is also stressed by the placement of this story after Brokaw's narrative on plowing fields and before his comments about how Briscoe's income went into the family kitty. Plowing fields and employment were jobs that he performed without pay to directly help others. Telling us about these jobs first show us how he placed others ahead of himself and his own ambitions.

Brokaw also emphasizes the work ethic of Bob Bush, the World War II medic who received the Medal of Honor. Years after the war, Bush's young son asked him what it was like fighting on Okinawa. Bush replied: "Well you know, it was very difficult. We had to dig foxholes. Hygiene was terrible. We had hair lice but we had a job to do" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 111). Like Briscoe, Bush's drive to work hard was driven by a sense of responsibility to the community. Bush applied his work ethic in the business world after the war. By giving us these descriptions, Brokaw makes a transition from working hard because of necessity to working hard because of choice. Many argue that the World War II generation did great things because their surroundings required it. However, this description of Bush's work after the war shows that he chose on his own terms to work hard and be great. Rather than saying that the World War II generation had to work hard, he tries to show us that they wanted to work hard. After the war, Bush

and another veteran bought a small lumberyard in the state of Washington. They bought lumber directly from sawmills and sold it to contractors, working seven days a week. Because their military training had given them the ability to function without any sleep, they devised a plan that every other week one of them would work a full twenty-four hour day, driving to Portland to pick up one extra load of lumber. They continued this routine for seven years (Brokaw, 1998, p. 110). Again, this shows how working hard was a choice and not necessarily a necessity. With this, Brokaw tries to dismiss arguments that the World War II generation was great because they had to be by instead showing us that they wanted to be great.

Brokaw discusses Bush's work ethic early as something that guided him through the war. As a medic, he "had a job to do" and his job was working hard to save lives. Yet, Brokaw discusses many of Bush's postwar experiences as well. By doing this, he emphasizes Bush's decision to work hard rather than his obligation to work hard because his situation required it. In postwar America, Bush was not placed under the same constraints he faced during the depression or during combat. Rather, he was only under the obligation of choice. Although the twenty-four hour days were not absolutely necessary, Bush and his colleague decided that they were beneficial. Bush's work ethic paid off. He later went on to own several more lumber yards and building-supply stores and eventually was able to give each of his sons the opportunity to buy a lumberyard and building-supply store. Bush financed the purchases for his sons, but would not give the properties to them for free; choosing to instill his own work ethic on his sons (Brokaw, 1998, p. 113). By emphasizing this, Brokaw shows that Bush's work ethic is something so valuable that he wanted his sons to exhibit it as well.

## **Adventure**

World War II put many people in unusual places. People from landlocked states who had never seen the ocean volunteered for the navy, while people who had never been in airplanes found themselves piloting them or jumping out of them. The driving force of adventure illuminated by such acts is an important theme of Brokaw's rhetoric. This is illustrated in the story of Thomas Broderick, who enlisted in the Merchant Marines, because he thought that branch of service would best satisfy his sense of adventure. After basic training and a mission to North Africa, Broderick found that the Merchant Marines did not satisfy his appetite. Being impressed by the paratroopers he saw while in Algiers, he decided to join the airborne, even though he had never been inside a plane. His superiors were astonished that he would want to trade the relative security of the Merchant Marines for adventure in one of the war's most dangerous outfits. They offered him a thirty-day furlough to reconsider, but he had already made up his mind. After seventeen weeks of infantry training in Mineral Wells, Texas and several more weeks of training with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne at Fort Benning, Georgia, Broderick was offered an instructor's job and a promotion. Broderick refused the offer and insisted on going overseas with his outfit (Brokaw, 1998, pp. 18-19).

Brokaw emphasizes Broderick's sense of adventure by praising the decisions he made. His sense of adventure took him away from safety, but also brought opportunity. Had he not been adventurous and joined the Merchant Marines, he would have remained at home and not have been able to journey to North Africa. He had the opportunity to be complacent in the Merchant Marines, his sense of adventure led him to a military outfit whose primary function, jumping out of airplanes, was something he had never even

done before. Rather than sitting in the safety of an instructor's position, he chose to stay with his outfit and go overseas.

### **Commitment**

'It was the last generation in which, broadly speaking, marriage was a commitment and divorce was not an option' (Brokaw, 1998, p. 231). Brokaw devotes much space to discussing the marriages of members of the World War II generation. In these discussions, he describes couples' personal commitments to one another as well as to the institution of marriage itself. This is clearly a topic used to compare the World War II generation with those that followed it. He goes so far as to provide statistical evidence to illustrate that divorces are more common today and gives some of the World War II generation's reactions to the new trend, stating:

Although divorce has been a common fact of life in America since the sixties, World War II couples have not fully adjusted; they're still unsettled by its popularity, especially when it occurs in their own families (Brokaw, 1998, p. 231).

Brokaw continues by commenting that at World War II reunions, almost all of the veterans show up with their first wives; if there is a second wife it is only because the first one had died. By telling us about the marriages of members of the World War II generation, Brokaw magnifies the value of commitment.

John and Peggy Assenzio were married a month after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. John was assigned to the 118<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineers, a unit responsible for clearing minefields, defensive barriers, and paving the way for troops and supplies that followed. John's line of work constantly put him in danger. In over twenty-three months of service, he participated in five different campaigns, including the fierce battles of Okinawa and

Leyte Gulf (Brokaw, 1998, pp. 233-35). His wife Peggy, at home teaching at a middle school, made a routine of writing John everyday. She comments, "I wrote every single day. I wouldn't break the routine, because I thought it would keep him safe" (233). Since John's duties required him to frequently be in combat situations, he was not readily available to receive mail. When he did, he would find stacks of letters from Peggy and read them in the order in which they were written. By telling us about these letters, Brokaw emphasizes the commitment Peggy had to the marriage. The simple act of writing a total of seven hundred letters exemplifies the commitment and determination that were a driving force of this generation.

After John came home, their marriage was put under a different type of strain. Because of John's harsh war experiences, he often experienced intense nightmares. Such episodes would often find him "thrashing around in their bed, sometimes knocking over a table lamp, occasionally sleeping on the floor to avoid hitting Peggy as he flailed out at the dark memories" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 238). These nightmares were often frequent, but instead of distancing herself from John and letting him deal with them by himself, Peggy drew herself close to John, comforting him and reminding him that they would get through the experiences together (Brokaw, 1998, p. 238). Even if Peggy did not physically separate from John, she could have emotionally separated herself from him within the marriage. However, she chose to remain faithful to her commitment to stay beside her husband "through better or worse." Brokaw closes this narrative with some concluding thoughts about marriage. He notes that this generation: "believed their wedding vows were not conditional," and he concludes with Peggy commenting that today's society is not as committed as they are:

They [today's couples] don't fight long enough. It's too easy to get a divorce. We've had our arguments, but we don't give up. When my friends ask whether I ever considered divorce I remind them of the old saying: 'We've thought about killing each other, but divorce? Never' (Brokaw, 1998, p. 239).

## **Responsibility**

Growing up during the depression, fighting a world war, and building postwar America took Americans who possessed a high sense of responsibility. Brokaw weaves this value through his rhetoric. Referring back to the discussion of Charles Briscoe, we can see that he had major responsibilities at a young age. Brokaw's narratives emphasize not only how the World War II generation took on great responsibility, but how they exhibited that responsibility by following through with their actions. If they had an obligation to carry out something, that action was carried out. They did not pass on their obligations as Brokaw feels subsequent generations have.

Wesley Ko is a World War II veteran whose responsibility is emphasized by Brokaw. In the late 1980's, government regulations and a flawed relocation deal caused Ko to lose his printing business and left him \$1.3 million dollars in debt. Rather than declaring bankruptcy, Ko determined to pay his creditors. He says, "I just didn't feel comfortable with declaring bankruptcy. I just didn't think it was the honorable thing to do, even though it would have been easier" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 44). Therefore, at the age of seventy, Ko negotiated how to pay back his creditors with whatever assets he had remaining and began working at a local electronics company with his stock options being applied to his debts (Brokaw, 1998, p. 44). Declaring bankruptcy would have been easy for Ko, since his debt was brought on by external factors. Ko however did not wish to cast his obligations aside. He chose to face his obligations.

Brokaw contrasts the World War II generation's sense of responsibility with that of subsequent generations by stating "the idea of personal responsibility is such a defining characteristic of the World War II generation that when the rules changed later, these men and women were appalled" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 39).

In the World War II generation, responsibilities were performed without question. When recounting his horrific experiences in combat as a medic, Bob Bush remarks, "we had a job to do" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 111). Theoretically, Bush could have taken the easy way out. He might not have ventured into enemy fire to save the lives of wounded soldiers, but he chose to fulfill his responsibilities as a medic. Bush's son Rick tells Brokaw: "Responsibility was their juice. They loved responsibility. They took it on head-on, and anytime they could get a task and be responsible, that was what really got 'em going" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 112). Serving in World War II was not option; it was an obligation that they were responsible for carrying out. Andy Rooney, who served as a reporter for *Stars and Stripes*, tells Brokaw about his experiences in the last days of the war. He decided to travel to Buchenwald, the largest concentration camp in Germany to see if the rumors he had been hearing were true. He says that upon viewing the horror "I was ashamed of myself for ever having considered refusing to serve in the Army. For the first time I knew that any peace is not better than any war" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 296).

Five days after arriving in Holland, the adventurous Thomas Broderick was shot in the head by enemy fire. The wound was so severe that a Catholic chaplain came to administer the last rites (Brokaw, 1998, p. 19). Miraculously, he survived but was left permanently blind. He feels no regret for his decision to go overseas and takes personal responsibility for getting shot, commenting, "It was my fault for getting too high in the

foxhole. That happens sometimes” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 24). He did not dwell on his blindness and feel that he had to rely on others to survive. His desire to be responsible for himself after the war drove him to enroll in insurance classes during the day and learn Braille at night. Veterans Affairs found him a job working with a local insurance broker and not long after Broderick established his own successful insurance business (Brokaw, 1998, p. 20). Brokaw praises Broderick for being ambitious. It would have been easy for him to be complacent and view his disability as something that would not allow him to prosper. Instead, he chose to be responsible for his past actions and responsible for taking care of himself and bettering his condition.

## **Conclusion**

*The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* construct stories about members of the World War II generation that turn them into symbols of an idealized American society. This same effect was seen during the election of 1984 in an eighteen-minute film that preceded Ronald Reagan’s acceptance of the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention. As Susan Mackey-Kallis (1991) notes, the film constructed Reagan as a Western American hero (Mackey-Kallis, p. 308). The film emphasized values and qualities that gave him that identity. One of the ways that Brokaw memorializes the World War II generation is by emphasizing virtues that they possessed and by praising them for exhibiting them. His choice of what values to emphasize is selective. Virtues are emphasized while vices are simply absent. By emphasizing only virtues and making them appear as though they are possessed by the generation as a whole, Brokaw creates a different identity and memory for them. This

new identity and memory of the World War II generation is one that is not only good, but is the greatest because their exceptional expressions of ordinary values far surpass the generations that followed. By comparing this generation to the ones that followed, Brokaw shows that they are not only a better generation, but the best. The way they express values far surpasses how proceeding generations expressed values. Thus, as will be discussed in the next chapter, people are invited to emulate this generation. The new memory of this generation is reinforced by his discussion of modesty. By emphasizing their modesty, he presents the notion that we do not really know who the World War II generation truly is. With this, he is able to give us a new identity and new memory of the World War II generation. This new memory and identity is what Brokaw memorializes and posits as the greatest generation that American society has ever produced.

CHAPTER 5  
INSTRUCTING THE AUDIENCE TO LIVE AND ACT ACCORDING TO THE  
WORLD WAR II GENERATION

This chapter will first look at how Brokaw instructs his audience to think and act toward the World War II generation. After first exploring Brokaw's definition of that generation and expressing later generations' appreciation toward them, I will then look at how he instructs his audience to think and act inwardly toward themselves by showing how Brokaw's narratives provide moral instruction. As will be discussed, this instruction is unique because, even though Brokaw crafts it, it is often heard through the voices of members of the World War II generation.

Tom Brokaw's narratives about the World War II generation may be illuminated by Walter Fisher's (1984) narrative theory. Fisher says that one function of the storyteller is to "impart knowledge, like a teacher, or wisdom, like a sage" (Fisher, 1984, p. 303). Fisher describes the storyteller as the expert of the particular narrative, the one who fashions its characters, subject, and details. Those who listen to the story rely on the storyteller to understand its message. In constructing narratives, "the expert assumes the role of public counselor whenever she or he crosses the boundary of technical knowledge into the territory of life as it ought to be lived" (Fisher, 1984, p. 303). This characterization is clearly evident in Brokaw's books. As he recounts the lives of the World War II generation, he does more than give statistics and objective information about them. As the voice of this generation, he becomes the choice of moral authority.

As he pays tribute to the World War II generation, he persistently suggests that the world would be much better if today's society exhibited the same values as the World

War II generation. He does not personally condemn today's society; rather, he leaves that responsibility to members of the World War II generation. Within the narratives, we find members of the World War II generation commenting that many of the values they hold dear are neglected today. For example, he tells readers that "a common lament of the World War II generation is the absence today of personal responsibility" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 24). Having the World War II generation describe this absence of values gives the claim the authority of that generation. If the World War II generation is as virtuous as Brokaw says, then we are more apt to revere their judgments and heed their advice. However, since Brokaw is the narrator, he is the one crafting the message. He produces his own message but uses the voice of the World War II generation to speak it. Thus, according to Fisher, Brokaw has crossed the boundary of technical knowledge into that of moral knowledge, and by doing so assumes the role of public counselor instructing his audience on how to make themselves and their world better.

However, Brokaw's role of public counselor is unique because even though he is the author and the one who constructs the message, we learn to be better people because of what the World War II generation did and what they say. Readers lose sight of the fact that it is Brokaw crafting the message because he is counseling through narratives. The more narratives we read, the less we see Brokaw, until he is seemingly pushed out of the picture. Wayne C. Booth (1983) states "we must never forget that though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear" (Booth, p. 20). Though readers learn the importance of working hard and modesty through the voices of the World War II generation, Brokaw is in fact the person instructing because he has designed and crafted the message.

Brokaw states that he hopes *The Greatest Generation* will “in some small way pay tribute to those men and women who have given us the lives we have today” (Brokaw, 1998, p. xxx). He also states that he wants *The Greatest Generation* “to be my gift to them” (Brokaw, 1999, p. xx). If the books are a tribute to the World War II generation, how is it that Brokaw takes on the role of public counselor and instructs those who are not a part of that generation? It is customary for memorialization to also provide moral instruction. For instance, while in Reagan’s Challenger speech, the crew of the Challenger is memorialized; living Americans are its intended audience. He praises the Challenger crew, but also wants “to say something to the schoolchildren of America who were watching the live coverage of the shuttle’s takeoff” (Reagan, p. 95). He tries to give some consolation to the children who were impacted by the disaster. Though Reagan memorializing the astronauts, he was also directing part of his speech to schoolchildren in order to comfort them.

Brokaw likewise memorializes the World War II generation as the greatest generation, but in also giving them a new identity as the greatest generation, his rhetoric moves those outside of it to become better people and produce a better world. According to Cheryl R. Jorgensen-Earp and Lori A. Lanzilotti (1998), memorializing advises and instructs people “about the future at the same time that it ‘reminds’ them of the past” (Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti, p. 151). By looking at the past, Brokaw instructs today’s society concerning how they should act in order to make a better future.

The sequel to *The Greatest Generation*, *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, is an interesting book because it stems from the effects of Brokaw’s first book and consists of letters written to Brokaw regarding the World War II generation. Many of these letters

are written by people who read the first book and felt compelled to tell Brokaw how he taught them to view the World War II generation differently and how his book instructed them. As he states, “*The Greatest Generation* seems to have inspired within many families, communities, schools, and even corners of the political arena a reevaluation of the past, and a dialogue about the core values of that time and of the present” (Brokaw, 1999, p. xxi). For many, Brokaw’s rhetoric instructed them to comprehend and interact differently with the World War II generation. Jonathan Birenbaum, the son of a member of the World War II generation wrote the following to Brokaw:

Having read *The Greatest Generation*, I find myself compelled to write to you..I am writing to thank you for helping me, after 45 years, to understand more fully my 85 year old father. Your observations and commentary have caused me to have a greater appreciation for a man I have loved and whose life has been devoted to my sister, my mother and me in a way that I am not sure even he has understood (Brokaw, 1999, p. 181).

Jonathan Birenbaum knew his father for 45 years. In that span, he had an understanding of who the man was. However, this understanding was not one that fully encompassed his father. By reading Brokaw’s book, his father took on a new identity. Before reading Brokaw’s book, Birenbaum probably did not feel that he had an insufficient understanding of his father, but Brokaw was able to put his father in a new and better light. By having his father set within the context of World War II, his son came to understand the factors that shaped him. But the effect of Brokaw’s book upon Birenbaum is more than a reconfiguration of how he perceives his father.

Jules Riedel wrote a similar letter to Brokaw describing his father-in-law, William Hull, who served in the Pacific during the war. He tells Brokaw that the book “woke up a stirring of pride” and that it “should be required reading for all high schoolers” (Brokaw,

1999, p. 186). Riedel was also educated about his father-in-law in a unique way because Hull coincidentally identified himself as being one of the people in a group picture in the book. Seeing the picture of his father-in-law in the book made the formation of his new identity more real because Riedel could see a contemporaneous picture that corresponded with the accounts and narratives given by Brokaw. Not only does Brokaw's selection of words help children realize who their parents were, but his selection of pictures do as well.

Louis Armijo, who is described in *The Greatest Generation*, was also the recipient of praise from people who read the book. Many were moved by Brokaw's book to express their gratitude to Armijo in the form of letters. Paul H. Limon, one former student of Armijo's, wrote to tell him how proud he was to have been taught by him. Limon's letter is interesting because he tells how he served in Vietnam after graduation. He tells Armijo that "as you and I know, war is a terrible thing. But it makes you really appreciate this great country of ours" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 190). Reading *The Greatest Generation* prompted Limon to thank Armijo as well as to recognize the bond that existed between them.

A refrain permeating the responses published in *The Greatest Generation Speaks* is that Brokaw has taught people to appreciate the World War II generation. Mike McReaken tells Brokaw that "reading about the many others in *The Greatest Generation*, I also understand and appreciate more why my parents made the choices and decisions that they did throughout their entire lives together" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 197). Because many in the World War II generation did not talk about their experiences, those who came after were not able to fully appreciate them. This is not to say that the World War

II generation was not appreciated before Brokaw's book. Yet, this appreciation is strengthened because Brokaw educates his readers about things of which they were unaware. McReaken comments that "it was difficult to read *The Greatest Generation* without tearing up or being emotionally choked up to know of the hardships, loss, and joy that my parents' generation suffered through" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 197). These aspects of his parents' past were previously unknown to him. Pat Zack sums up this sentiment when she tells Brokaw "thank you for providing me with the opportunity to get to know my father" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 198). Barbara Yearing tells Brokaw that his book captured qualities of her father's generation that she had taken for granted (Brokaw, 1999, p. 199).

In a letter to Brokaw, Janet McKeon writes:

As a member of the early Baby Boom generation who lived through the Vietnam years, I thought we were the group who had been wronged, with our boyfriends/husbands fighting in a faraway place in a war that nobody wanted to be a part of, and with no appreciation by others of what we went through (Brokaw, 1999, p. 195).

Reading *The Greatest Generation* gave McKeon a new perspective not only on her parents' generation, but her own as well. She says that the book opened her eyes and taught her about the hardships, fears, and separations her parents and those like them faced. Because her parents never talked about those trials, she was not fully aware of them. Brokaw's book instructed her not only to better appreciate her parents, but also to realize her own selfishness (Brokaw, 1999, p. 196). His new understanding of the World War II generation indirectly helps give Baby Boomers a new understanding of who they are. Jenny Tharp Young echoes this sentiment when she tells Brokaw "it is only after reading your book and after the death of our father that we are really and truly beginning to understand him and in understanding our father, we are beginning to know ourselves a bit more" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 211).

Brokaw not only wants to instruct his audience to think and act differently toward the World War II generation, but he also wants them to think and act differently themselves. He wants to tell readers that they can be better individuals if they follow the example of that generation. It is Brokaw who ultimately creates and fashions that guidance, but because it is spoken through the voice of the World War II generation we do not recognize Brokaw as its designer. As he highlights and emphasizes virtues exhibited by the World War II generation, he is at the same time pointing out that these were not as prevalent in the generations that followed. This argument is often presented out in a straightforward manner. He tells readers that “a common lament of the World War II generation is the absence today of personal responsibility” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 24). He also states that World War II veterans “talked matter-of-factly about a sense of duty to their country, a sentiment not much in fashion anymore” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 37). Yet, Brokaw not only describes this absence of values, the World War II generation describe it as well. In the discussion about the ROMEO Club (Retired Old Men Eating Out), Brokaw allows these veterans to speak about lamentable changes in society. They say that in the generations that came after them, there appears to be an absence of obligation, responsibility, duty, and respect (Brokaw, 1998, p. 83). Brokaw softens these negative sentiments by also having them vocalize their belief that there is great potential in those who come after them. They brag about the accomplishments of their children and grandchildren and comment, “you know, you forget there are so many good kids out there yet. I have a great feeling for the country and the kids coming along” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 83). By saying this, Brokaw shows his readers that they too can enter into the values of the World War II generation. They have the potential to exhibit these values,

and even the World War II generation has faith in that potential. This also shows how Brokaw, while outside of the narrative, still plays an important role in its creation. With all of the negative comments about today's society, readers might take offense and think that the older generation is generally pessimistic. By including positive comments, Brokaw also does a little damage control. He shows that they are not pessimistic, but realistic by showing that they believe there is hope.

### **Instructing about Work Ethics**

The discussion of the ROMEO Club shows how the World War II generation laments the decline of values in subsequent generations. Lefty Caulfield, who served in the Navy during the war, comments that people "don't appreciate things because you don't work for them" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 82). He remembers his family struggling through the depression and having to work hard simply to survive. This generation acknowledges the hardships they faced growing up and realizes that such hardships are not faced today. Charles Briscoe worked hard plowing fields while in the seventh grade because it was necessary. Times have changed and some argue that the work ethic of the World War II generation is not relevant today. However, Brokaw shows that many of this generation applied their work ethic to situations where their survival was not at stake. In the postwar years, they could have taken a backseat in American society because the depression and war was over. They could have easily claimed that they had fulfilled their obligation to society and relied on others to sustain them. They instead chose to turn postwar America into an industrial and financial superpower. In describing this generation, Brokaw takes care to describe what they did once the war was over. He tells

readers how they applied the work ethic that guided them through the depression and the war in their postwar lives. Briscoe's work ethic is shown to readers in his struggles during the depression. Yet, Brokaw skillfully continues to show how that work ethic enabled him to be an integral part of the team that designed and built the B-29, the bomber whose payload brought an end to the war in the Pacific. After the war, Briscoe continued working for Boeing. During his tenure there, he did extensive work in helping design the Boeing 737, which is now the world's most popular airliner. This action could be viewed as simply having a postwar job, but at the age of seventy, Boeing asked Briscoe to come back and work on several special projects (Brokaw, 1998, pp. 94-95). Brokaw makes certain that readers acknowledge that Briscoe worked not because of need but because of principle. He could have laid to rest his work ethic because the times did not summon it because of the life he lived before and during the war, nobody would have thought ill of him had he retired to a quiet, unproductive life working an insignificant job. While Briscoe teaches us by example that hard work pays off, Brokaw seemingly stands behind him and nods in agreement. Yet, in actuality it is Brokaw who is truly instructing us by crafting the narrative.

By describing continuity in the lives of the World War II generation before, during, and after the war Brokaw instructs his readers. He shows the impact of hard work during times when it was not necessary for survival, and he shows how hard work positively impacted people's lives and the world around them. By displacing arguments about the work ethic into narratives, Brokaw avoids the preachiness that might have come from simply saying that people today should work as hard as the World War II generation did. He does need to preach; he has his subjects do this. For instance, in the conclusion

of this narrative we are told how Briscoe “teaches his children and grandchildren by example.” While the parents of today’s children “buy them fancy cars and depend on someone else to keep them running” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 95), whenever Briscoe’s grandchildren needed a car, he bought one that was hail-damaged for much less than retail value and proceeded to restore the car with the help of the grandchildren. He remarks “I had my grandchildren help me so they’d learn that if you want something badly there’s a way to get it” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 95).

### **Instructing Commitment**

Marriage is something that Brokaw describes as being looked upon differently by the World War II generation and today’s society. Peggy Assenzio, the wife of a World War II veteran, vocalizes what seems to be commonly felt by the World War II generation. Regarding marriage, she says, “they [today’s couples] don’t fight long enough. It’s too easy to get a divorce. We’ve had our arguments, but we don’t give up” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 239). Clearly, Brokaw feels that if today’s society were as committed as the World War II generation, America would not have the ever-increasing divorce rate it has. As he does with discussing working hard, Brokaw shows readers the benefits of extreme commitment. Brokaw feels that society’s outlook on marriage has changed. He states that the World War II generation was “the last generation in which, broadly speaking, marriage was a commitment and divorce was not an option” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 232). Giving this outlook on marriage, he shows what happens when marriage is considered a commitment. Recognizing that the struggles today’s couples face may not be as intense as those faced by their elders helps Brokaw counsel today’s society. If the struggles the older generation faced are much more intense than those faced by today’s

couples and they were able to remain together because of their commitment, then that same commitment can be applied to today's marriages to ensure their longevity and success in less trying circumstances. We are being taught by example. By telling us about long and faithful marriages that were held together by commitment, Brokaw functions as a marriage counselor, giving us examples of how marriage should be viewed and operated in order for it to remain strong through the years.

John and Peggy Assenzio tell us that their commitment to their marriage is what has helped it survive over the years. Peggy says that she knew that writing letters to John everyday would somehow keep him alive. They tell us about his nightmares and how her simple presence helps him through each terrible ordeal. He says, "the war helped me love Peggy more, if that's possible. To appreciate her more" (Brokaw, 1998, p. 238). Let us take a step back and look at this story John and Peggy Assenzio have told us. Did they really tell us the story? Their voice is the one we predominantly hear, but let us not forget that Brokaw is the creator of the narrative. They were interviewed by Brokaw and through that interview he picked and chose what parts about their life to include and which to leave out. Brokaw is not letting himself be in the forefront. He is not telling his audience that they should be committed to marriage like he and his wife has. One would think that the Assenzio's were giving marriage counseling. Yet, Brokaw is the marriage counselor by providing an example of two people committed to their marriage.

### **Instructing Responsibility**

"The idea of personal responsibility is such a defining characteristic of the World War II generation that when the rules changed later, these men and women were

appalled” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 39). Again, Brokaw speaks through the voice of the World War II generation to say that today’s society is less responsible for their actions. To do this he creates a dichotomy between acts of responsibility among the World War II generation and what today’s society does. The previous quote is taken from Brokaw’s discussion of Wesley Ko, the veteran who paid back the debts his printing business incurred instead of declaring bankruptcy. The lesson we learn from Ko does not have a monetary value. The situation dealt with accepting or running away from responsibility. Because Ko accepted responsibility, he is lifted up and praised. He did not take the easy way out and run away from what he felt was an obligation. Brokaw tries to convey to his audience that principle is more important than material outcome. Ko would have come out ahead financially had he declared bankruptcy, but he is praised for accepting responsibility. Ko regrets that today’s society does not have the same sense of responsibility as his generation and laments that “everything comes too easy. Nowadays you just don’t make the effort like you did in our day” (Brokaw, 1998, p. 44).

In this narrative, we hear Ko telling us how he assumed responsibility and that that responsibility is lacking in today’s society, but it Brokaw who is fashioning the narrative. We hear Brokaw’s message through Ko. Losing a business is usually something that is not looked favorably upon because it is usually the result of mismanagement or some other negative factor or influence. However, Brokaw constructs the narrative in a way that we see more of Ko’s business practices after he lost his business than before. Also, Brokaw is careful to paint Ko’s misfortune as something that resulted from an outside influence and beyond his own control. Brokaw constructs Ko’s narrative in a way that elicits sympathy and guides by example. Thus, we sympathize

with Ko and listen to his instruction to take responsibility. We think that it is Ko who tells us about responsibility, even though Brokaw designed the entire message.

We have seen that memorializing lifts up individuals as well as illuminates the values they possess. An even more important aspect of memorializing is its instructing quality. In *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, Tom Brokaw instructs his audience that if they exhibited values the way they are exhibited by the World War II generation the world would be a much better place. What is unique about this instruction is that even though Brokaw gives it, it is often heard through the voice of the World War II generation. Brokaw feels that the World War II generation exhibited responsibility more extensively than today' s society, but it is World War II veterans who we explicitly hear conveying that message to us. Brokaw, as the storyteller, designs and fashions narratives that have the characters telling us how life should be lived. By doing this, readers think of Brokaw as someone who has unearthed a treasure chest. While readers think that the treasure speaks for itself, Brokaw is in fact telling readers what the treasure is and how it influences them. In actuality, instead of unearthing the treasure chest, Brokaw made the treasure chest. Through memorialization, Brokaw creates a new identity of the World War II generation as the greatest generation in American history. It is because of this identity that we find ourselves heeding to Brokaw' s instruction spoken through their voices.

The identity that Brokaw creates for them is also significant because while it is virtuous, it is not out of reach for his audience. If the World War II generation were placed high upon a pedestal, out of reach of readers, they may not heed to Brokaw's instruction. They may realize that they can never be like the World War II generation

and thus not try to emulate them. However, Brokaw is careful to make these individuals real as well as virtuous. Using many “ordinary” people in his books shows audiences that “ordinary” people can become “extraordinary.” Thus, readers who see themselves as “ordinary” can become “extraordinary” if they heed the instruction posited by Brokaw and live up to the virtues possessed by the World War II generation. This message coincides with what is found in other more negative epideictic, such as Robert Bork’s (1996) *Slouching Towards Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline*. Bork also says that those who came after the World War II generation are bad, but while his rhetoric shows the need for instruction and change, Brokaw’s rhetoric, and other rhetoric in popular culture that memorializes the World War II generation, provides models for such change.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

*The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* address several different audiences. By looking at these audiences, we can discern how Brokaw's message may be received and the different responses it may elicit. Brokaw himself says his book is a tribute as well as a gift to the World War II generation. In this regard and as evidenced by some of the letters reprinted in *The Greatest Generation Speaks*, one of his audiences is the World War II generation itself. If Brokaw's motive is to create a new identity for the World War II generation as the greatest generation, does he try to tell them who they are? Oddly enough, it seems that he does. One of the themes that run throughout his rhetoric is that members of this generation do not talk about themselves or what they have done. They have not incorrectly labeled themselves, but Brokaw feels that their modesty, humility, and reservations about discussing the past have caused them to not truly realize how great they are. Thus, Roderick Berry, who served in the Pacific theater during the war, did not see himself as belonging to a group called "the greatest generation." After reading *The Greatest Generation*, he wrote the following to Brokaw:

Your book prompted me to rethink my thoughts after my generation. I began talking about it to friends about 15-20 years younger than me. I was surprised to learn many people agreed with you and consequently disagreed with me (Brokaw, 1999, p. 182).

Berry later tells Brokaw "how I am proud of my generation, thanks to you" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 183). Brokaw addresses the World War II generation not by explicitly telling them that they do not truly know themselves, but by playing upon their modesty. He tries to make them see that what truly defines a person's identity is what other people

think about them. By doing this, Brokaw is able to tell people that he knows them better than they know themselves without coming across as being arrogant.

The second audience that Brokaw addresses is the children of the World War II generation. Because many of their parents did not talk about the past, whether because of modesty or because they did not want to relive painful experiences, others created their parents' identities. Many of them knew that their parents experienced the Great Depression and World War II, but probably did not know the full extent of this experience. They knew the attributes of their parents, but did not know from where those attributes came. *The Greatest Generation* addresses the children of the World War II generation by educating them about their parents. Linda Matthews, the daughter of a Marine who served in the Pacific theater, tells Brokaw "I have found that many in my generation have a general sense of apathy regarding this period of history and the experiences of their parents" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 173). Because not many of the World War II generation's children have tried to seek out and understand their parents' past and those same parents have shied away from discussing it with their children, the depth of the experiences of the World War II generation has remained unknown to these children. As Janet McKeon tells Brokaw, "I knew my dad had served and that my older sister was born during the war, but he never talked about it and I guess I was never interested enough to ask" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 196). Because of this unknown aspect, Brokaw feels compelled to tell people who their parents truly are.

What response does he hope to elicit? One response is summed up by Jonathan Birenbaum who tells Brokaw "thank you for helping me, after 45 years, to understand more fully my 85 year old father. Your observations and commentary have caused me to

have a greater appreciation for [my father]” (Brokaw, 1999, p. 181). Numerous letters to Brokaw tell him how children of the World War II generation have come to appreciate their parents more because of his book. Such responses make sense because of the memorializing nature of the book.

The children of the World War II generation also come to view themselves in a different light after reading Brokaw’s book and striving to live their lives as their parents did. Brokaw promotes this response by describing how many of the values exhibited by the World War II generation are neglected by their children. By discussing how values are displayed or neglected, Brokaw tries to show the children of the World War II generation that their parents benefited by prominently exercising values that they themselves have neglected. In doing this he tries to reeducate this audience by saying that their parents are not merely “different” but “better” than themselves. Several told Brokaw that his book opened their eyes to the realities, not only of their parents, but also of themselves. After reading *The Greatest Generation*, these children were able to put their own lives and experiences into a broader perspective. Several Baby Boomers who lived through the Vietnam War and felt that they had been wronged by society told Brokaw that his book gave them a new perspective. They expressed a new sense of gratitude and good fortune.

Brokaw’s book also spoke to the grandchildren of the World War II generation, who here learned about their grandparents for the first time. As H. Harrison Wheeler states, “even with me, his namesake grandson, he is often reticent and unwilling to discuss his Army days. They were, he says, some of the worst days of his life, and he has no wish to relive them” (Brokaw, 1999, p. 200). Others, like David Bock, never had the

opportunity to meet their grandparents. Their only memories are those fashioned by stories and old photographs. Brokaw's book helps this young generation learn about their grandparents. Many would confess, as did Bock, that as they read the book, they realized that their grandparents "could have easily been among those you profiled" (Brokaw, 1999, p. 200).

Because *The Greatest Generation Speaks* is a collection of personally selected letters, one might be wary of using it as the sole guide for determining its own impact. However, as other sources have shown, the impact of the first book described in its sequel is very true. There were 750,000 copies in the first printing of *The Greatest Generation* alone, easily making it a number one New York Times Bestseller (Publishers Weekly, 12/13/1999, p.1). The book later went on to sell 2.3 million copies in its first six months (Washington Times, 10/15/2002). Over five million copies are currently in print (Confessore, 2001, p. 1). Articles written about the book also reflect many of Brokaw's premises, such as how members of the World War II generation do not talk about their deeds and how their values have become lost in subsequent generations (Brudnoy, 1999, p. 53). But has the American public accepted Brokaw's claim that the World War II generation is the greatest generation? Does it accept the identity that Brokaw posits? There are clear illustrations to show that many have. In many places, the World War II generation has become labeled as "greatest generation," even when no explicit reference to Tom Brokaw or his book is made. *Time* magazine and the United States Senate for instance have used this label (Schickel, 2001, p. 74 & Special Committee on Aging, 2001).

Teachers across the country have also utilized *The Greatest Generation*. Random House, Inc., Brokaw's publishing company, offers teacher and reader's guides as well as examination copies of the book (Random House, Inc., p. 1). Colleges such as San Diego State University and the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point have also incorporated *The Greatest Generation* into history and literature courses.

Some of the guiding principles of memorialization that have been looked at in this study were derived from studies of physical memorials. By looking at the role of the rhetor or creator of physical memorials, we can see its connection to discursive memorialization and Brokaw's books. For example, statues of ordinary men and women of the past transform them into giant god-like characters by physically elevating them and through the magnitude of the size of the monument. In these representations, with blemishes seemingly left out, an idealistic image is created. Brokaw operates in a similar way through his selective treatment of the ideal attributes of his subjects. Physical memorials cast light upon their subjects so that the invisible becomes visible. For example, the Vietnam memorial illuminates the human cost of the war with its enormous list of casualties. Rather than simply stating that there were 54,000 casualties, the memorial gives the names of the fallen soldiers. The names which were previously unknown to us, are now clearly shown. Brokaw's books illuminate in a similar way. We know that people who receive the Congressional Medal of Honor exhibited great courage, but through Brokaw's narratives, we now know exactly who receives the medal.

*The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks* are examples of a recent rebirth in interest in World War II in popular culture. This movement not only wishes to learn more about the World War II generation, but to tell others about it as

well. Brokaw researched the World War II generation so that not only he would know their story, but so he could tell others that story as well. A product of this drive to memorialize and tell others about World War II is the campaign to construct a World War II memorial in our nation's capital. After several years of deliberation, Public Law 103-32, which calls for the creation of a Washington D.C. memorial honoring those who served in World War II, was signed into law on May 25, 1993 (Kaptur, 2002, p. 2). However, there were many obstacles lying ahead. No site or design had been chosen nor had the estimated \$170.6 million dollars needed to construct the memorial yet been raised (Wilborn, 2003, p. 1). World War II commemorative coins were minted and sold by the government and celebrities including Tom Hanks and many veteran organizations have led fundraising campaigns. On November 11, 1995, the site for the World War II Memorial was dedicated near the "Rainbow Pool" located on the Mall between the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument (Kaptur, p. 3). The American Battle Monuments Commission, an independent agency of the executive branch of the federal government that oversees construction and future maintenance of the memorial, has currently received \$188 million in pledges and donations. Work on the memorial began in September 2001, and it is on schedule for its dedication on Memorial Day 2004. According to Bob Dole, who is now the memorial campaign National Chairman, "this memorial will be a permanent reminder of the service of millions of young men and women—not only those in uniform, but that generation—for the great sacrifice they made" (Wilborn, p. 1).

The first function of memorialization discussed in this study, lifting up and illuminating the World War II generation, can be seen in Brokaw's works by looking at

how he not only lifts people out of obscurity but also lifts up and illuminates select actions, experiences, and characteristics of people. Further research on memorialization can look at this function and examine whether images created by memorialization are accurate depictions of the subject or depictions of the subject crafted by the rhetor.

Through memorializing the World War II generation, Brokaw also emphasized values that they exceptionally exhibited. As rhetor, Brokaw emphasized certain values while neglecting vices. By only giving examples of virtuous people, we conclude that the whole generation is virtuous not only because the values they exhibit but also because of the vices that we are led to believe are absent from their lives. Further research needs to be done on looking at how our views of virtuous people have been fashioned through memorialization and rhetoric as a whole. For example, how accurate are our perceptions of the founding fathers compared to how they really lived? If research has shown that several of them were possibly adulterous and fathered illegitimate children, then how did we come to view them as virtuous people? What role did memorialization and rhetoric play in emphasizing their values and neglecting their vices?

Finally, memorialization instructs its audience to act and adhere to the values exhibited by its subject. As we have seen in this study, the role of the rhetor as a counselor is unique. Even though audiences perceive that the World War II generation is teaching them through instruction and example to embrace certain values, Brokaw is actually the teacher. He chooses what messages to give his audience, and as they read his book, he disappears behind the characters and narratives that he fashions. Although readers hear the voice of the World War II generation, Brokaw is essentially telling that voice what to say. Further research needs to look at the construction of messages through

memorials and other artifacts to analyze the role of the rhetor. Does the Vietnam memorial speak to veterans or does Maya Lin? Do the astronauts of the space shuttles Challenger and Columbia show us how to live our lives or do Presidents Reagan and Bush tell us?

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Was Tom Brokaw right to call the generation that fought World War II "The Greatest Generation?" Why was World War I fought? What was the generation called that fought in World War I? Ronil Doshi, Avid reader of history. That is World War I. A generation of young men wiped away in four years, inflicted by bitter entangled old men. These young men, who I hold dear in my heart, and high in my mind, who were wiped away and were truly lost. Now for the Second World War, I'll define it myself. The Greatest Generation was a phrase coined by American writer Tom Brokaw. It's based on the idea that the Americans who fought in WW2 fought willingly for a just cause - a view that by and large still exists today so hence the phrase staying popular. 202 views · View 4 Upvoters.